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Joint Standing Committee on Migration
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AUSTRALIA

Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia from the Islamic Council of Victoria.

The Islamic Council of Victoria ('ICV') is the peak body for Muslim organisations in Victoria. The ICV represents Victoria's more than 120,000 Muslims; through its 38 member organisations located throughout metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria. The ICV makes this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration ('Committee').

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you and applaud your efforts in seeking public discussion on the matter of migration. The ICV acknowledges that there is a difference between migration and multiculturalism, but clearly states that one cannot exist without the other.

We are also concerned that the current fear and alarm over multiculturalism is actually more a discussion about Muslim integration and assimilation and we feel that the public discourse needs to be more clear about what that means as we believe that in a tolerant and multicultural society, one should be able to observe halal, wear the burqa, and build places of worship without hindrance (subject to the law of the land) – contrary to much of what we are seeing today.

Muslim immigration to Australia has brought many benefits to our nation, including a skilled work force. However, there are some challenges that have made it difficult for some Muslims to feel part of a wider national collective. Part of that is the perception that Australian society does not respect individuality with respect to religious practice.

The ICV notes that the overwhelming majority of Australian Muslims want nothing more than to get on with their lives and make meaningful contributions to this wonderful country. Constantly being singled out and problematised makes this so much harder to do, especially when done for political gain as seen by recent comments by certain Federal Parliamentarians. We call upon those Parliamentarians who feel so strongly that there are issues within the Muslim community not integrating, to dialogue directly with Muslim

leaders as we would be more than happy to come to the table to discuss their perceived concerns.

It is ironic that their complaints about the Muslim community have strategically excluded direct representations to this community. Furthermore, it is arguable that in choosing to propagate their message via the media, this renders their comments disingenuous at best and provocative at worst.

We recommend:

- The Committee address religious intolerance (as opposed to just racism) in educating Australians that all religious practice are permissible in Australia as long as it's not illegal or impacts on the rights of others (as Muslims have been observing);
- The Government recognise that housing affordability, access to multicultural services and a fear of racism is one of the reasons certain Muslim communities (but not all) congregate in specific suburbs (i.e. Lakemba, Broadmeadows) and not that there is a intent to create separate enclaves;
- Pathways to employment are harder for young Muslims due to lack of understanding of cultural norms (on the part of many newly arrivals) as well as fear of discrimination from employers. We recommend greater support of employment programs (targeting young Muslims) in areas with higher Muslim populations.

We look forward to the opportunity to make an oral submission or to host an interview to discuss these matters further.

Yours,

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President
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