

Inquiry into the issues facing diaspora communities

The Community of South Sudan and Other Marginalised Association appreciates the opportunity to respond to questions on notice.

Questions on notices came from Senator Fierravanti-wells:

Australia is a multicultural country. The South Sudanese community is not the first and it won't be the last community to have its members coming to Australia and facing tensions. Most communities in Australian history have shown that it takes about 30 or so years for a good integration of communities. Having said that, along the way, many communities—and larger communities—including the Italian Australian community of which I am part of even though I was born here in Australia, have faced tensions, have faced issues. We saw that in the 1980s with Griffith and allegations about mafia and all sorts of issues associated with that. But what is really important and what history has shown us is that each of those communities had the willingness and the intention of the leadership of those communities to work together to overcome their problems. The few bad apples tainted the good name and the good legacy of those who took the step to come to Australia to make a home for themselves and for their children. So my question to you is: have you taken the opportunity to reach out to other communities that have faced problems in the past and talk to them about the opportunities?

I note your comment about government involvement and government support, but government giving money and government support don't engender willingness for different views to be set aside in the name of peace and harmony. That's a comment, and I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

The first question on notice is whether South Sudanese community in Sydney has reached out to other communities that have had similar experiences in relation to intra-communal tensions. The Community of South Sudanese and Other Marginalised Association (COSSOMA) has been in contact with The NSW Jewish Board of Directors. The current president of COSSOMA received mentorship from the NSW Jewish Board preparing him to play a significant leadership role in addressing some of the concerns raised by Senator Fierravanti-wells.

During various times in the past, South Sudanese community leaders in NSW reached out to NSW Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) for support. ECC is the peak body for ethnic communities in NSW. More established communities specially those from European backgrounds whose families migrated to Australia in 1950s and 1960s actively participate in the ECC. Members of these communities have experience in intra-communal tension management as pointed out by Senator Fierravanti-wells.

The second question on notice which was a comment from Senator Fierravanti-wells is not quite clear or straight forward. Senator Fierravanti-wells comment was in reference to a comment made earlier. Senator Fierravanti-wells suggestion that 'government funding does not engender willingness for different view' is reasonable. No one takes an issue with that. However, to engender willingness for different views to emerge and be heard, various groups within the South Sudanese community need to work together and develop a process that enable them to rise above their difference and enable a space in which they can listen to each other. Anyone who understands this process would tell you that resources including funding are needed to ensure that people within a community dominated by intra-communal tensions

can address them. The South Sudanese community at this point at least is unable to source these resources without government funding.

Another problem with government funding, a topic covered very well by the South Sudanese Victorian representatives who provided evidence, is that almost all of it is given to non-South Sudanese community organisations. Funds to support the South Sudanese community should be given directly to South Sudanese community organisations. Alternatively, South Sudanese community members must be involved in determining who gets the funds.

Tensions within the South Sudanese community are exacerbated by other factors including unemployment, unacknowledged citizenship, racism, negative media, cancellation of visas and deportation of community members. These challenges, although have nothing to do with the kind of community tension being discuss here, heighten anxiety in the community. It is more likely that in a community with heighten anxiety that intra-communal tension escalates and remains sustained for a while.