

## Answers to Questions on Notice - Australian Human Rights Commission

*Provided 21 July 2017*

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Good afternoon,

Please see below Dr Tim Soutphommasane's response to Question on Notice to the Senate Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism.

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**CHAIR:** Two things that came up were education and the role of the media in all of this. They are obviously big questions. Apart from what has come through in your submissions, which is more education, particularly through the school curriculum, do you have any other thoughts on education? We heard about trying to get better representation within the media for people from different backgrounds. Do you have any other suggestions for how we improve the representation of CALD and immigrant communities in terms of the stories we are telling through our mainstream media? Who wants to take that on?

**Dr Soutphommasane:** I might give this some reflection and take it on notice, but I believe there is an important role the media has to play in providing fair, accurate and responsible reporting and commentary on issues concerning race, religion and immigration. Too often there can be a pronounced focus on conflict in reporting and commentary, which only creates polarisation in our community and does little to advance public understanding of issues. There is a clear need for improvement on this front. Some of it could be achieved if you had better representation of diversity within the ranks of those who work in the media, but there can be more thorough efforts in educating media understanding of what are febrile and delicate issues. I will take that question on notice, if I may, because it is an important question.

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### **Response to Question on Notice:**

There remains considerable scope for Australian media organisations to improve their performance on cultural diversity. A notable exception is that of SBS, which has been exemplary as Australia's dedicated multicultural broadcaster.

Internationally, media organisations in the UK and Canada have for some years adopted policies aimed at boosting the representation and treatment of cultural diversity – including commissioning guidelines on cultural diversity, collection of data on cultural diversity, development funding for culturally diverse media professionals and targets on culturally diverse hires.

There are signs that Australian media organisations are considering policies to strengthen their efforts on cultural diversity along such lines. For example, in its Equity and Diversity Plan for

2016-18, the ABC set cultural diversity targets for non-English speaking backgrounds. A target of 15 per cent has been set for senior executive staff, and up to 12 per cent for Content Makers. Such an approach does not yet appear to be adopted within Australian commercial media.

Australian media organisations should also consider strengthening their relationships with multicultural communities and the professional development of media professionals. This could involve establishing regular forums with members of multicultural communities and representatives, and supporting recently established groups such as Media Diversity and the Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network.