

I wish to make a submission to the Inquiry Into Multiculturalism being undertaken most timely by the Australian Government on behalf of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church.

We have been extremely disturbed by the actions of some world governments including our own, to dismiss and denigrate multi- culturalism as no longer being relevant to our countries. We believe that this is a most dangerous and backward step which if continued could plunge us into a new wave of fear, blame, antagonism and opposition to those born overseas, both those who have already enriched this nation, and those who would do so if permitted.

Australia has without a doubt hugely benefitted from the wide range of migrants welcomed to our shores. In every area of human endeavour, whether it be food, music, poetry, film, construction, education, culture generally, tolerance, our country has been richly improved by those who come to our shores, whether through choice or less fortunate circumstances.

Economically, migrants have proven to be a strong source of hard work, commitment and enrichment to our society.

It is a general rule, that those who come to a new country, quickly establish relationships and worth ethics that we need so badly.

Migrants generally work hard, play hard and rest hard because they are determined to make this new opportunity a rewarding one both for themselves, their families and their chosen country.

Historically, there has been a determination by governments, in harsh economic times, to scapegoat particular sections of the community depending on the situation, it could be Unions, Jews, Muslims, Communists etc. This occurs to divert the population away from the economic crisis that affects their lives.

There is always a danger that migrants can become scapegoats, particularly with a media that promotes isolated incidents of bad behavior as if it relates to specific nationalities.. So, for example, if a man is involved in a speed accident which results in a death, He is identified as a Sri Lankan, or an African or an Aboriginal, whereas if he is a white Australia, he is identified as a 48 year old male. There should be legislation prohibiting the media from highlighting individuals nationalities in such situations which only add to racism and serve no other useful purpose.

Refugees in particular should be treated strictly in accordance with our responsibilities to the United Nations Charter.

However displaced people arrive here, whether it be by boat or plane, their needs and skills should be assessed and where possible such refugees should be 'apprenticed' quickly while their claims are being assessed so that their integration and value to our community are not lost.

Incarcerating them in 'prisons' will not advance their ability to be productive, constructive citizens who we need badly.

Every effort should be made to ensure that new migrants, legal and illegal, understand that we are a democratic nation, committed to ensuring their welfare and their contribution to their 'chosen' society is of utmost importance to government and people.

Importantly, we need a commitment to quality, affordable, secure PUBLIC housing to provide for newcomers to our shores and indeed all needing secure housing because without secure housing, there is no genuine future for anybody to participate in our society.

It is a shortsighted government indeed that would reject multiculturalism which has been so valued and important a programme to the betterment of Australian society.

Yours sincerely,

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