Australian Parliament
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Submission no. 386

Parliamentary Inquiry on Multiculturalism

Submission by Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University

For Australia, multiculturalism is not a 'moral option' but a 'practical necessity'.

Historical Background

The Indigenous peoples of Australia, who are themselves culturally diverse and belong to many language groups, are the original inhabitants of the Australian continent and nearby islands. The earliest definite human remains found to date are about 40,000 years old, but the time of arrival of the ancestors of Indigenous Australians is a matter of debate among researchers, with estimates dating back as far as 125,000 years ago.[1] The lives of the Indigenous peoples were irrevocably changed with the establishment of British penal colonies beginning in 1788. More than 160,000 convicts were brought to Australia until transportation as punishment ceased in 1868. From the early 1790s, the convicts were joined by free immigrants. The gold rush era of the 1850s was influential in bringing people from many parts of the world, the largest non-European group at this time being Chinese.

It is now widely acknowledged that the original inhabitants were dispossessed of their land and subjected to various forms of discrimination by the first British and European settlers. Racial discrimination would continue to impact on the lives of Indigenous Australians in the two centuries following white settlement. Racial intolerance, however, was not directed exclusively at Indigenous communities. With increasing migration from different parts of the world, prejudice and discrimination would also be targeted on newly arrived groups, especially those with language backgrounds other than English, despite the fact that government migration schemes actively encouraged settlement in Australia.

The 'White Australia Policy', embodied in the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901,* was aimed at ending the employment of Pacific Islanders, who had been brought in as cheap labour on sugar plantations in northern Australia. The origins of the policy can be traced back to the 1850s, when white miners' resentment towards industrious Chinese diggers culminated in violence on the Buckland River in Victoria, and at Lambing Flat (now Young) in New South Wales. The governments of these two colonies introduced restrictions on Chinese immigration. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, leading politicians were emphatic that there was no place for 'Asiatics' or 'coloureds' in the Australia of the future. Restrictions introduced by the 1901 Immigration Act included a dictation test which was used to exclude certain applicants by requiring them to pass a written test in a language that the applicant was not familiar with and had been nominated by an immigration officer. The 'White Australia' policy, it should be stressed, was warmly applauded in most sections of the community. In 1919 the Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes, hailed it as 'the greatest thing we have achieved'.

The policy was gradually relaxed after the Second World War, but the emphasis on European immigration remained until 1966, when the government allowed the migration of 'distinguished' non-Europeans. The last vestiges of the policy were discarded in 1973. From 1901 to the early 1970s, policies towards newcomers were largely based on assimilation.

Both community attitudes and government policies were characterised by a strong preference for British migrants and an expectation that other migrant communities would shed their cultural identities, including their own languages, so that they could be more effectively absorbed into the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. From the mid-1960s a new understanding gradually took hold that migrant communities of non-British origin, largely European, had experienced considerable hardship, and that the attempt to integrate them into a monocultural society was neither feasible nor desirable. By 1973, the word 'multiculturalism' had been introduced and minority communities set about forming local and national associations to promote their languages and cultures within the wider society.

Immigration Policy and Multiculturalism

At a very simple level multiculturalism can be said to describe the religious and ethnic diversity of Australia, a land of migrants. As of June 2009 around one quarter of the estimated resident population was comprised of people born overseas. At the 2006 Census 45 percent of Australian residents were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas. Australians identify with some 250 ancestries and practise a range of religions. In addition to Indigenous languages, around 200 other languages are spoken in Australia. After English, the most common languages spoken are Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic and Mandarin.

Policy change has gone through a number of phases. March 1966 is often cited as a watershed in the abolition of the White Australia Policy. Non-European migration began to increase: annual non-European settler arrivals rose from 746 in 1966 to 2,696 in 1971, while annual part-European settler arrivals rose from 1,498 to 6,054.

In 1973 the Federal Government took three further steps towards removing race as a factor in Australia's immigration policies. It proceeded to:

- legislate that all migrants, of whatever origin, be eligible to obtain citizenship after three years of permanent residence;
- issue policy instructions to overseas posts to totally disregard race as a factor in the selection of migrants;
- ratify all international agreements relating to immigration and race.

Because the overall immigration intake was reduced, these reforms had little immediate impact on the number of migrants from non-European countries. However, the number and proportion of migrants from non-European countries would significantly increase during the Fraser years.

In 1978 the government commissioned a comprehensive review of immigration in Australia, which led to the adoption of far-reaching new policies and programs as a framework for Australia's population development. They included: three-year rolling programs to replace the annual immigration targets of the past; a renewed commitment to apply immigration policy without racial discrimination; a more consistent and structured approach to migrant selection; and an emphasis on attracting people who would represent a positive gain to Australia.

From the Second World War to 2006–07, more than 6.6 million migrants from some 200 countries came to Australia. However, as time has gone on immigration has increasingly favoured the entry of people with designated skills and expertise. At same time, some effort

has been made to accommodate arrivals by people displaced by upheavals in their homelands. These included migration from Indo-China in the 1970s following the fall of the Saigon regime and the defeat of the United States in Vietnam, from East Timor in 1975 following the Indonesian invasion, and from the Balkans following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and large-scale programs in ethnic cleansing from 1991 to 2001.

Table 1: Migration program outcomes for 2005–06 to 2009–10 and planning levels for 2010–11

Category	2005-06 Outcome	2006-07 Outcome	2007-08 Outcome	2008-09 Outcome	2009-10 Outcome	2010-11 Planning Levels
Total Family	45 291	50 079	49 870	56 366	60 254	54 550
Total Skill	97 336	97 922	108 540	114 777	107 868	113 850
Skill as percent of total program	68.1	66.1	68.4	67.0	64.0	67.5
Total Program	**142 933**	**148 200**	**158 630**	**171 318**	**168 623**	**168 700**

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship
http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/statistical-info/visa-grants/migrant.htm

Important Trends in Australia's Multicultural Diversity

The immigration patterns of the last few decades have given rise to several trends that are worth noting:

1. The first and the most obvious is Australia's emergence as a cosmopolitan and dynamic society, as evidenced by the growth of community language schools, ethnic media, ethnic businesses, diverse religious practices and places of worship, and the rich variety in cultural activities – in food, fashion, music, art and architecture.
2. The second trend is the growing number of migrants who have been coming from Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries.

   The table overleaf clearly shows the radical change that has occurred over the space of the last hundred years.

Top 10 countries of birth, 1901 and 2006 censuses

1901 Census				2006 Census			
	Country of birth	Number	%*		Country of birth	Number	%*
1	United Kingdom	495 074	13.1	1	United Kingdom	1 038 150	5.2
2	Ireland	184 085	4.9	2	New Zealand	389 460	2.0
3	Germany	38 352	1.0	3	China	206 590	1.0
4	China	29 907	0.8	4	Italy	199 120	1.0
5	New Zealand	25 788	0.7	5	Vietnam	159 850	0.8
6	Sweden and Norway	9 863	0.3	6	India	147 110	0.7
7	India	7 637	0.2	7	Philippines	120 540	0.6
8	United States	7 448	0.2	8	Greece	109 990	0.6
9	Denmark	6 281	0.2	9	Germany	106 530	0.5
10	Italy	5 678	0.2	10	South Africa	104 130	0.5
Top 10 total		810 113	21.5	Top 10 total		2 581 470	13.0
Other		47 463	1.3	Other		1 834 560	9.2
Total overseas born		857 576	22.8	Total overseas born		4 416 030	22.2
Total Australian population		3 773 801	100.0	Total Australian population		19 855 290	100.0

* Percentage of total population

Source: DFAT, 'Australia: A Culturally Diverse Society'
http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/culturally_diverse.html

But even these figures do not convey the extent of the diversity in terms of the countries represented in the migration intake of recent years, or how quickly this diversity has grown in the last two to three decades.

The table overleaf shows the wide range of countries from Africa, Asia and the Middle East that now feature in Australia's migration programs.

Settler Arrival Data: Selected Non-European Countries of Birth for the Financial Year 2009–10

Country of birth	Total	Country of birth	Total
Afghanistan	1 460	Bangladesh	1 715
Bhutan	560	Burma (Myanmar)	1 781
Cambodia	938	China	16 644
Congo (DR)	563	Egypt	856
Ethiopia	736	India	15 626
Indonesia	1 500	Iran	1 837
Iraq	2 567	Kenya	489
Korea	2 425	Lebanon	1 009
Liberia	310	Malaysia	3 507
Mauritius	289	Nigeria	304
Pakistan	1 635	Philippines	5 958
Sierra Leone	421	Singapore	1 421
Somalia	567	South Africa	7 153
Sri Lanka	4 440	Sudan	713
Taiwan	648	Thailand	2 353
Turkey	360	United Arab Emirates	257
Vietnam	3 012	Zimbabwe	927
	Total all countries	**140 610**	

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship
http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/statistical-info/oad/settlers/setdatb.htm

3. It is worth noting, however, that despite the successive waves of migration, no non-English speaking community represents as yet a significantly large minority in Australia (as is for example the case in a country like Malaysia, where the Chinese and Indian minorities constitute 24% and 7% of the total population respectively).

   In the 2006 Census the largest non-English speaking community in Australia were the Chinese who made up just 1% of the total population.

   What this means is that no single non-English speaking minority in Australia has the demographic muscle which can pose a serious challenge to the dominance of existing cultural traditions and institutions.

4. There is, however, one religious faith, namely Islam, which has grown considerably in recent years and has captured a good deal of media and political attention. The number of Muslims in Australia has risen from 2,704 in 1947 to 22,311 in 1971 and more than 360,000 in 2009 (as of now the figure probably stands close to 400,000). Almost 60% of Muslim Australians are aged 29 and under. In some Melbourne and Sydneyneighbourhoods, Muslim communities make up as much as 30% of the local

population. Over time, Australia's Muslim population will continue to grow in absolute and relative terms – a trend that is also evident in many European countries.

Ill-informed comment has periodically been made drawing attention to this trend, in ways that has fuelled undesirable levels of Islamophobia. This is deeply regrettable. The fact remains that Muslims make no less good citizens of this country than any other religious community. It should also be noted that Muslims still make up less than 2% of Australia's total population, and that the Muslim community is rather fragmented, being the most ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse religious grouping in Australia. Although Lebanese Muslims are the largest and highest-profile Muslim group in Australia, Lebanese Christians outnumber their Muslim counterparts by a ratio of 6 to 4.

5. In coming to terms with the significant changes that have occurred in Australia's cultural fabric it is important to take account of the scale and nature of temporary (and not just permanent) migration.

   People may enter Australia on a temporary basis under the temporary residence program, whether as visitors, students or for a range of specialised purposes.

   Temporary entrants include:

   - tourists
   - students
   - business people for short stays
   - people with specialist skills, such as managers, academics and medical practitioners
   - people who make a social or cultural contribution to the community, such as entertainers, media and film staff, sports people, religious workers, visiting academics
   - people who contribute to the development of international relations, such as diplomatic personnel, participants in exchange programs and working holiday makers.

Temporary Visas granted – 2005-06 to 2007-08

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Non-business visitors (mainly tourists)	3 195 039	3 223 010	3 191 678
Business Visitors	368 333	404 790	418 250
Students	190 674	228 590	278 184
Working Holiday Makers	111 973	134 610	154 148
Business (Long Stay)	71 150	87 310	110 570
Others	41 251	43 190	44 530
Total	**3 978 420**	**4 121 500**	**4 197 360**

Temporary migration is significant in multicultural terms because much of it is drawn from non-English speaking countries. This feature is especially striking when one looks at the countries which are providing the bulk of international students coming to Australia.

Major source countries for overseas students:

Citizenship	2008–09	2009–10
India	65 503	29 721
China, People's Republic of	54 015	54 409
Korea, Republic of	17 594	16 367
Nepal	14 355	6 039
Thailand	13 612	11 707
Brazil	12 609	11 444
Malaysia	11 567	10 634
United States of America	9 598	8 998
Vietnam	9 389	8 376
Indonesia	8 756	8 684

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship
http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/50students.htm

Taken together these trends briefly surveyed above point to a rapidly changing cultural landscape. They suggest that Australia's economy as well as its social, educational and professional life will be increasingly influenced by the cultures, religions, languages and traditions that have reached Australia through its permanent and temporary migration programs.

Multiculturalism: An Invaluable Asset for Australia

Governments at Federal, State and local level have all come to recognise that the large immigration program as it has evolved since the Second World War has enormously benefited Australia. Immigration policy, it is true, has at times been controversial, especially during periods of economic down-turn. In 2002, a CSIRO population study entitled *Future Dilemmas*, commissioned by the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, outlined a number of potential dilemmas associated with immigration-driven population growth, in relation to Australia's trade balance, impact on the environment, and social policy.[2]

Though all these are important considerations which must be taken into account when determining population policy, and in particular appropriate rates of population growth, there can be little doubt that Australia's multicultural fabric represents an asset of immense value to Australia. However, as with all assets, the value to be derived from our ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity depends ultimately on how the asset is managed, and the kinds of investment policies that are pursued.

The objectives of immigration and multicultural policies are many and diverse. In this submission we focus on certain key tasks that are critical to the future development of Australian multiculturalism. What we propose is in some ways foreshadowed by the important policy statement on multiculturalism *The People of Australia* released in February of this year by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Hon Chris Bowen MP, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Kate Lundy.

The statement spells out what the present Government regard as key policy benchmarks. These may be briefly summarised as follows:

- embracing and benefiting from the strength of our different cultural traditions;
- strengthening social cohesion;
- making government services and programs responsive to the needs of culturally diverse communities within an access and equity framework;
- using Australia's multicultural character to gain a competitive edge in an increasingly globalised world.[3]

These four benchmarks derive from the same overarching principle, namely ensuring the thoughtful and creative management of Australia's irreplaceable asset that is its cultural diversity. Wise harnessing of this asset, we submit, can deliver rich returns with respect to six national priorities:

- ***Social harmony and cohesion*** (at times threatened by local prejudice or international tensions and conflicts);
- ***Better educational outcomes*** (through more systematic nurturing of our enormous reservoir of linguistic, cultural, technical and organisational skills and competencies);
- ***A more productive workforce*** (through the careful fostering of culturally sensitive workplace conditions and practices);
- ***A more effective trading performance*** (through a range of incentives designed to help businesses develop culturally sophisticated human resource, promotional, product design and negotiating strategies);
- ***A coherent and comprehensive security policy*** (that is tailored to the cultural needs and potential of Australian society and sensitive to the cultural traditions and preferences of our trading, security and diplomatic partners);
- ***A better focused regional and global role*** (that takes full advantage of the potential for intercultural dialogue and cooperation – a key but often neglected pillar of regional cooperation, and an important consideration in terms of Australia's commitment to and participation in the UN system and other international institutions and negotiations).

In what follows we identify four key areas as requiring special attention. We argue that imaginative institutional and policy initiatives in each of these areas over the next five years would yield rich returns with respect to the six national priorities outlined above.

Intercultural Training

A number of programs run or supported by government, at the Federal, State and Local level, are helping to enhance appreciation of cultural diversity, civic values and inter-religious and intercultural harmony. Yet, relatively few programs are specifically designed to enhance levels of intercultural awareness, or what may be termed higher levels of cultural literacy. Yet, such programs would be enormously valuable, especially if they are well tailored to the needs and circumstances of particular constituencies. Several constituencies immediately suggest themselves:

- business managers
- police and security forces
- community welfare providers
- prison workers
- youth workers
- teachers, administrators and chaplains in schools, colleges and universities
- key professions, including lawyers and doctors.

This is not a comprehensive list, yet it is indicative of the different contexts where those in positions of responsibility are dealing almost on a daily basis not just with products and technologies, but also with a range of cultures, languages, religions, and social and ethical preferences and traditions. To perform their tasks effectively and responsibly they need both knowledge and understanding of the culturally diverse context within which they are working both in Australia and in their dealings overseas. Within an increasingly globalised world the demand for intercultural skills will continue to grow. In Australia's case, enduring business, professional and technological partnerships have to be built on deep and respectful appreciation of the rich cultural wealth of our Asian and Pacific neighbourhood. Australia's multicultural fabric presents a unique asset for making these fruitful connections.

This knowledge and understanding does not, however, grow spontaneously, it has to be carefully nurtured through a range of intercultural training programs.

It follows therefore that Australia's 'National Innovation System' should, among other things, encourage, support and fund the research, educational and training institutions, projects and methodologies that can foster this deeper 'cultural' knowledge and understanding. Such a development would have wide-ranging application in several key areas of policy, including industry, trade, education, health, external relations, security, and, of course, indigenous affairs, immigration and multicultural affairs

To make this possible three things are needed:

a) Strategically selected forms of national and international networking and collaboration that effectively mobilise intercultural knowledge and understanding;

b) Careful identification of research and training priorities around themes that give due prominence to cultural knowledge and management of cultural diversity (including diversity of languages);

c) A more systematic attempt to identify international best practice in these areas of study, research, training and educational organisation.

A National Centre of Excellence for Intercultural Diversity

To respond effectively to these needs the Federal Government should consider developing a few strategic instruments. A National Centre of Excellence for Intercultural Diversity would be one such instrument. Its mission would be to advance knowledge and innovation as it relates to managing cultural and religious diversity – first and foremost within Australia, but also in Australia's relations with its region and beyond. Its primary focus would be on the implications of cultural diversity for social cohesion, economy and trade, environment, education (at all levels), media and communications, national security, and international relations.

The Centre would seek to use Australia's multicultural assets in developing intercultural studies and programmes with practical policy and community application. It would play a leadership role in research, education, public debate and policy development. Its underlying mission would be to explore how cultural diversity can be used to generate innovative research and training programs that support prosperity, conflict resolution and a safe national and international environment.

The Centre would also focus on intercultural relations as they impact on Australia's engagement with Asia (both East Asia and South Asia) and the Middle East, as well as with traditional areas of interest in Europe and North America.

One of the Centre's key interests would be young people, and how cultural diversity can be mobilised to advance education and employment, and reduce alienation and extremism.

The Centre would be hosted by either one university or a consortium of universities, selected through a competitive process open to all Australian universities. The successful university/ies should ideally be located in a city and region noted for their multicultural diversity, partnerships and international connections.

While maintaining its independence, the Centre would cultivate strong productive partnerships with:

a) community organisations (both within Australia and internationally)

b) the business community, professional bodies and unions

c) government at all levels (local, State and Federal)

d) regional and international organisations

e) other research institutions nationally and internationally

f) philanthropic organisations.

The Centre would establish a Consultative Committee representative of these various constituencies to help inform its research, educational, community engagement and policy development activities.

The Australian Government would provide funding over a five-year period to support the establishment of the Centre. Such funding would cover infrastructure costs and a number of specified research and educational projects. The successful institution(s) would provide the Centre with additional support.

Interfaith Dialogue

In recent years, and especially since September 11, 2001, initiatives in dialogue generally and interfaith dialogue in particular have become commonplace. Australia is no exception. Federal and State governments have made funds available, meetings of religious leaders have been convened, booklets and guidelines produced, and school and community projects initiated. Though faith and culture are not interchangeable concepts, they invariably connect, especially in the case of the migration waves that have occurred since the early 1970s,

All this is a timely antidote to the politics of fear and mistrust. There is no disputing the value of much that has been attempted. The time, energy and resources spent on the dialogue of cultures and religions are an indispensable investment in Australia's multicultural future. There are nevertheless considerable possibilities for improvement. Three are especially worthy of attention. Dialogue initiatives are needed that are pro-active, sustainable, culturally sensitive and mutually reinforcing.

Avoiding the pitfalls of 'reaction'

Though interfaith dialogue is not new in Australia, it is the attacks of September 2001 and the Bali bombings of October 2002 which have triggered the recent proliferation of interfaith activities. A study by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 2003 listed over 101 projects, many of which were interfaith in nature. However, several of these initiatives have been largely motivated by an attempt to moderate Islamic radicalism and to defuse actual or potential tensions of the kind that erupted in the 2005 Cronulla riots. Much attention has centred on containing the fallout from periodic incidents involving Muslim communities, especially those that have exposed 'deep cracks in Sydney's tolerant veneer'.

Muslim organisations have been asked to enter into dialogue with their Christian and Jewish counterparts in the hope that such dialogue would be a useful antidote to militant radicalism or 'violent extremism', with the implication that this undesirable phenomenon would be found primarily within Muslim communities. This is far too narrow an understanding of social cohesion on which to base the development of interfaith activity.

It would be fair to say that the limitations of this 'reactive' approach are as yet not well understood in some policy-making circles, in the wider society and even among some dialogue practitioners. Too much emphasis has been placed on responding to perceived tensions. Dialogue is not primarily about putting out bushfires, though it can certainly help. It is about prevention rather than cure. Interfaith dialogue should not be seen as a short-term instrument for solving problems but rather a long-term approach to the development of cultural literacy and inter-cultural cooperation.

Building more solid foundations

In most states, religious organisations have been involved in interfaith relations, either through high-level meetings involving religious leaders or participation in peak bodies. Here, the initiative usually lies with those in positions of authority. At lower levels initiatives have also been taken sometimes with and at other times without the formal approval of the religious leadership. Official initiatives generally have been guarded when it comes to substance, and have often been confined to polite exchanges.

A second major cluster comprises organisations whose primary purpose is to promote interfaith contact and cooperation, for example the Multifaith Centre at Griffith University, the Multifaith Association of South Australia, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and the recently established Jewish-Christian-Muslim Association. Other organisations that do not have an explicitly religious profile, but have played a significant intellectual and organisational role in promoting interfaith dialogue include the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the Centre for Dialogue at La Trobe University. Many religious organisations have also contributed to the growth of interfaith activity, including a range of Catholic, Uniting Church, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist organisations. Mention here should be made of two Muslim-Turkish based organisations associated with the Gülen movement, Affinity Intercultural Foundation in Sydney and Australian Intercultural Society in Melbourne, which, have sponsored a wide range of high profile dialogue activities, and have popularised the shared breaking of the fast during the Ramadan period. .

Perhaps the most positive trend thus far, in which the State of Victoria appears to have made considerably more headway, has been the growth of local interfaith networks. Many of these have operated with varying degrees of municipal support. Since the inception of the Dandenong Interfaith Network in 1989, close to 40 locally based networks have seen the light of day in Victoria, most of them located in Melbourne. A significant development has been the establishment in 2010 of the Northern Interfaith and Intercultural Network (which covers the municipalities of Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Moreland, and Whittlesea) – this is the first regional interfaith network in Australia. The Eastern Metropolitan Region of Interfaith Networks (Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse) held its inaugural forum in March 2011.

The cessation or reduction of interfaith activity has been a feature of many funded projects, not just those that are locally based. In several instances completion of funded projects has not yielded any visible ongoing activity. Experience suggests that several conditions must be met if such projects are to prove sustainable:

a) they must be sponsored or supported by organisations that have a long-term commitment to dialogue and are themselves prepared to invest resources in the projects in question;

b) the projects themselves must reflect a firm grasp of the philosophy, method and practice of dialogue; and,

c) each project, regardless of its objectives and mode of operation, must have a clearly articulated educational and training component that widens the human resource pool needed to sustain the dialogical process over the longer term.

Government programs (Federal and State) that seek to support interfaith activity should as a matter of urgency integrate these principles into their brief, funding guidelines and periodic evaluation.

Developing more effective communication

Success can create its own problems. While the number of initiatives has grown markedly since September 11, it is only very recently that we have the beginnings of effective communication between projects, networks and organisations. The result is often inadequate sharing of knowledge. To cite one example, in both Victoria and New South Wales a number of separately constructed schools projects have been initiated, with only the most limited sharing of information and experiences.

Closer liaison between organisations and initiatives would alleviate these problems. It would probably be useful if a highly respected and relatively well resourced organisation in each state could serve as a clearing house for interfaith initiatives in that state. It might then be possible to establish a national network allowing for exchange of information and views across states. At some point it may become feasible to hold an annual or at least biennial conference which brings together all relevant stakeholders to evaluate progress over the intervening period, set broad priorities for the period ahead, and establish more effective methods of communication and coordination. Government could play a useful supporting role in developing such infrastructure – though at all times exercising care not to allow its support to undermine the independence of the interfaith movement.

The 'next phase'

Most interfaith projects to date have concentrated on increasing knowledge and understanding of different faiths, that is, of their respective beliefs, texts and religious practices, including fasting and prayers. Visits have been organised to each other's places of worship and even homes. Less frequently, joint prayer services and discussions have been organised. Much of this activity has served primarily a 'getting to know you' function, which is crucial and needs to continue, and be actively supported.

The time has come, however, to aim a little more ambitiously, especially in the case of organisations and networks that are relatively well established. First, we need to foster a wider understanding of the key principles that should inform the dialogue. Secondly, we need to develop programmes that build upon past experience and the "getting to know you" stage. Thirdly, we must link more clearly religion and culture. *Interfaith relations must be placed in the context of intercultural awareness*

Those engaged in interfaith relations normally acknowledge that dialogue is not an opportunity to score points in religious or political argument, or to convert or proselytise. But the principles of dialogue go beyond this simple statement of aims.

In dialogue, participants

- Respect each other as persons;
- Celebrate the value and contribution of each other's faiths and cultures;
- Acknowledge that they do not hold a monopoly on wisdom and truth;
- Understand the importance of listening as well as speaking;
- Affirm the important ethical (and spiritual) values they share in common;
- Accept that there are differences, and that such differences are an invaluable source of mutual enrichment;
- Recognise that relations between different faiths, cultures and communities have at times given rise to mistrust, suspicion, hostility , even violence;
- Understand that empathising with and acknowledging the pain and suffering of others is often a precondition to healing and reconciliation.

All of this helps to explain why dialogue cannot confine itself to words, important though words are. Dialogue is worthy of the name when it makes possible cooperative practical action to promote the common good and serve the needs of the wider community.

In local settings cooperation can take place around any number of issues: education, health, domestic violence, employment, environment, transport, assistance for new arrivals to the country. Harnessing the energies and creativity of young people is an important priority. Dialogue processes should speak to the needs and aspirations of young people, especially those who are Australian born and of non-English-speaking background, and who therefore face the difficult challenge of negotiating life across two cultures.

Where conditions are right, dialogue can also encourage discussion of complex social issues, be they local, national or international, including immigration policies, rights of migrant communities, women's rights, environmental concerns, the appropriate relationship between religion and the state, Australia's relations with the outside world.

Community dialogue is most likely to flourish and prove durable when it is able to negotiate across both religious and cultural differences. Much needs to be taken into account – not just the way we eat and dress, but attitudes to authority, to personal relationships within and outside the family, to work and leisure. Dialogue needs to explore the deeper social, economic, physical and psychological insecurities that people experience – including the insecurities that arise from migration, whether voluntary or forced. The purpose of dialogue is to identify the sources of insecurity, and to find agreement on constructive ways of dealing with such insecurities.

There is one other important dimension to interfaith / intercultural dialogue that needs careful consideration – the international dimension. Here we can do no more than refer to it. Religions and cultures involve a web of international connections, exchanges and attachments which can inform and enrich the dialogue in Australia.

Given the importance of immigration, refugee flows, trade, security relations and educational and other exchanges, we have a strong interest in developing our capacity to negotiate cultural and religious differences not just at home but abroad. Professional, school, religious, municipal and other exchange programs can play a key role in nurturing new patterns of

understanding and cooperation. They can strengthen the intercultural fabric of Australian society, and add an important new pillar to the construction of an Asian-Pacific community.

Language Policy

Language policy is too large and complex an issue to do justice to it in this submission. Here the focus is on the connection between multiculturalism and linguistic diversity. The consolidation of this diversity is integral to Australia's cultural heritage, in two important and complementary ways:

a) Languages offer an indispensable window on the cultures that make up Australian society – languages are reflected in the literature, films, performing arts, music, print and electronic media, popular culture (shops, markets, bars, cafes and restaurants) of different cultures;

b) Linguistic diversity is part of the rich mosaic that is our Australian multiculturalism – it is a living mirror of our ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. The learning of languages is a powerful tool that can facilitate intercultural awareness and help to heal tensions.

The learning of languages must therefore be seen as central to the preparation of students for multicultural citizenship.

Which languages? In principle all languages, both international and community languages. The distinction is in any case artificial. By virtue of its extraordinary migration history, Australia is now a microcosm of the world's languages – some 60 to 80 languages are widely spoken, and among these we find many of the world's most important languages. The major European languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian), Asian languages (Chinese, Hindi, and Bahasa Indonesia) and Arabic are all well represented in Australia. The two possible exceptions are Russian and Japanese.

Learning of languages is critical to the development of intercultural literacy, hence to greater social cohesion, and to more effective relationships with our trading and investment partners (many of our current partners understand us much better than we understand them). Entrepreneurs, bankers, merchants, diplomats, scientists, journalists, peacekeepers, who don't know the language of their counterparts are often considered by them intellectually and culturally deficient, though they are usually too polite to say so.

Despite our extraordinary linguistic diversity, the survival of community languages is by no means assured – either quantitatively or qualitatively. Some 16% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (29% in Sydney and 27% in Melbourne). But transmission is proving difficult – the first generation of community languages (European) is experiencing considerable difficulty in transmission. Over a 10-year period (1991-2001), the use of European languages in Australian homes declined markedly: Italian declined by 15.6%; German 32.6%; Polish 11.8%; Maltese 21.9%; and French 12.9%. Asian languages and Arabic are generally doing better, but only because they have benefited from higher levels of migration. On past trends, we should expect the same outcome.

Unless the communities that have settled in Australia are able to retain proficiency in their respective languages, they will find it increasingly difficult to connect with their culture of birth – especially if the objective is to connect with a living culture that is constantly evolving in its social, intellectual, artistic and political forms (not just the language and culture of 20, 50 or 100 years ago, but the language that is spoken and lived today in the countries where that

language is the principal medium of communication). Here it should be stressed that community languages are not just for each of the migrant communities. Italian or Chinese is not just for those of Italian or Chinese descent but for all other Australians, both for Anglo-Australians and the other more recent migrant communities.

How to give effect to these aspirations is a daunting task, particularly in a society that has complacently accepted the simplistic proposition that ultimately one needs only command of English to get on in the world. Needless to say, mainstream schools (government, religious and independent schools), but also community languages schools (or ethnic schools), as well as colleges and universities (which teach students and train future teachers) have an important part to play – but their respective contributions must be integrated into a more coherent whole than we have so far achieved.

All teaching institutions must provide both students and parents with greater incentives for the learning of languages. A more effective system of rewards must be introduced for the learning of languages at each level of education – primary, secondary and tertiary. Some of these rewards can be made available by the educational institution itself. Students that have satisfactorily completed language proficiency at any level must be given certain entitlements once they proceed to a higher level. This is especially important in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Universities, in particular, must be strongly encouraged (by a mixed strategy of rewards and penalties) to facilitate the admission of students who have satisfactorily completed language study at Year 12 level. Similarly, the business and government sectors must reward applicants to jobs, who have completed three years of language study at university level.

The issue is not just language policy, but education and employment policy. We need to cultivate a mindset that acknowledges the importance of a multilingual Australia, and nurtures and rewards linguistic proficiency.

Key features of this mindset are worth noting:

- Communities retain a vibrant connection with their ancestral languages and cultures;
- Australians of all backgrounds are actively encouraged through all our institutions (educational, media, business, professional, governmental) to develop multi-lingual skills and the intercultural sensitivities that go with them;
- Educational institutions (pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary and continuing) and educators are materially and intellectually equipped to foster the intermingling of languages (and cultures);
- The study/teaching of language is regarded as a high status activity [by students, teachers, parents, governments and society at large];
- Federal and State governments are prepared to invest heavily on language development at every level of education;
- Language policy outgrows the shallow polarization between:
    - Community and international languages
    - Asian and European languages
    - The so-called ‘economic’ and ‘cultural’ benefits of language learning

According to some estimates, 36% of primary teachers and 70% of secondary teachers are not adequately qualified. An effective language strategy is one which aims to produce teachers of the highest quality – highly trained, highly skilled, well-respected and remunerated language teachers.

This requires a whole-of-government strategy that mobilizes to the full Australia's rich cultural resources at home and abroad. Importantly, it would be a strategy which identifies all the key stakeholders and establishes firm and enduring connections between them.

The obvious stakeholders are teachers, students, and administrators. Less obvious but no less important are:

- The university sector (which is responsible for the training and professional development of teachers, for admission of students with language skills and interest in language study, and for public advocacy of the benefits of linguistic diversity. Governments at all levels, and especially the Federal Government should use all levers at their disposal to coax universities to fulfill these responsibilities);
- The business, professional and government sectors (through their respective recruitment and human resource policies);
- The media (through their use own use of languages other than English and their advocacy of linguistic diversity);
- Ethnic and religious organisations (that have a strong commitment to linguistic diversity and the necessary outreach to give voice to that commitment);
- Diplomatic missions (that represent countries whose languages we wish to learn).

What is needed is a national strategy facilitated by government that enlists the active and sustained engagement of all these stakeholders.

Whole-of-Government Approach

Management of cultural assets (including intercultural dialogue and cooperation) is integral to several key areas of national policy, in particular immigration, education (not least language policy, international students), research and innovation, employment and workplace relations, trade, law, national security, foreign policy, media, culture and the arts.

If the capacity to negotiate ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious difference is a key to the future of Australian society, economy and security, then enhancing that capacity has to be strategically integrated into a whole-of-government approach. Such an approach requires a clear formulation of policy objectives and strategies, appropriate inter-departmental and inter-agency coordination, appropriate allocation of resources, and periodic evaluation and review.

In short, what is needed is *A National Strategy* that brings current policies and programs into a wider and carefully integrated framework. Such a framework would establish principles and guidelines for the periodic review of existing programs, with a view to determining whether some should be expanded, and others downsized, modified or in some cases abandoned. It would also allow for the development of new initiatives. The key to such a national framework would be to ensure that individual projects and programs mutually strengthen each other, that unnecessary overlap is reduced, and that progressively more ambitious outcomes are achieved with high levels of efficiency and sensitivity.

Commissioning of Report

Any decision to develop a National Strategy of the kind proposed here should be based on the best possible information, and on careful evaluation of available options. It is better to do the necessary preparatory work than to rush into it and produce something that is either lacking in substance or unsustainable. The proposal, therefore, is that the **Government commission a detailed report to consider a whole-of-government approach to the development of Australia's cultural infrastructure.** Such a report would investigate whether and how a National Strategy of the kind proposed would advance key national objectives, in particular:

- Strengthening Australia's economic capacity and competitiveness;
- Fostering social harmony and homeland security; and
- Developing a more solid and sustainable framework of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Such a report would examine:

a) current policies, practices, institutional arrangements and projects in the above mentioned areas;

b) international best practice in these areas;

c) the relevance of ideas, proposal and recommendations developed by the Alliance of Civilisations (of which Australia is a member) and other relevant international and regional organisations;

d) options available to government if it were to develop a National strategy.

The report could be commissioned by the Australian Multicultural Council (the establishment of which is foreshadowed in *The People for Australia*). It would be prepared in close consultation with all relevant stakeholders, and in the context of detailed discussion with relevant departmental officers, with particular terms of reference and guidance set by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Notes

[1] 'When did Australia's earliest inhabitants arrive?', 17 September 2004 (accessed at: http://media.uow.edu.au/news/2004/0917a/index.html on 2 April 2011).

[2] *Future Dilemmas: Options to 2050 for Australia's population, technology, resources and environment*, CSIRO Resource Futures Working Paper 02/01, Canberra, CSIRO, 2002.

[3] *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy*, p.2, launched 16 February 2011 (accessed at: http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf_doc/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf at 3 April 2011).

The Centre for Dialogue would be pleased to answer any questions arising from this submission and to develop in greater detail any of the ideas and proposals it contains.

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