



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

(VICTORIAN DIVISION INC) ABN 59 485 457 115

Patron: His Excellency the Governor of Victoria

United Nations Association of Australia (Victoria) Submission to the Joint Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism and Migration.

Background

The UNAA Victoria (“the Association”) is a non-profit, non-government, membership-based, community organisation that promotes the aims and ideals of the United Nations and seek support for the UN and its programs and agencies.

The primary and secondary purposes of the Association as set out in its Constitution are:-

STATEMENT OF PURPOSES

The primary purpose of the Association is to support the United Nations in that attainment of its aims as set out in the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations –

- To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.
- To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.
- To establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained; and
- To promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

In support of its primary purpose, the secondary purposes of the Association are –

- To fulfil responsibility as a constituent Division of the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) and, through it, as part of the World Federation of United Nations Associations *WFUNA, a non-government organisation having consultative status with the United Nations).
- To promote among the people of Victoria knowledge and understanding of the rights, duties and responsibilities of the Commonwealth of Australia as a member-state of the United Nations.
- To support and facilitate the work of the United Nations and its staff in Australia.
- To inform, advise, lobby and influence governments, in particular the Victorian Government, on matters within the cognisance of the United Nations and on their

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responsibilities as part of the United Nations system.

- To initiate policy and research for presentation to the United Nations through WFUNA, the Australian Government and other means.
- To develop an active and informed membership throughout Victoria (through meetings, seminars, newsletters and other activities).
- To acquire the assets and assume responsibility for the liabilities of the former unincorporated association known as the United Nations Association of Australia (Victorian Division).
- To do all additional or incidental things which may support these purposes.

The Association plays a critical role in connecting Australians with the UN and educating the community on key international and local environmental, human rights and social justice issues. In particular it does this through conducting model United Nations Assemblies in schools and universities, organising the highly valued annual UN Media Peace Awards, World Environment Day Awards and many other activities.

United Nations Associations represent a vital link between the UN and citizens of its member states. The United Nations Association of Australia is represented in every state and territory through its divisions and national body. The divisions work together to campaign in support of the UN and its priorities such as the Millennium Development Goals, human rights, gender equality, the environment, global health, sustainable development, peace and security.

At the outset we believe that it is necessary to acknowledge our multicultural society as a permanent part of the landscape. That, and our position in the Asia-Pacific, puts Australia in a profoundly important position. As the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council has said *“the story of immigration and multiculturalism so far, is one of which we should be proud – as proud as we are of our soldiers, sports stars, scientists, artists and pioneers. As much as Anzac or any other Australian story, it is our story.”*

We note that the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (1) was a major step towards the recognition of diversity as central to sustainable development. Of relevance to this Inquiry and critical to the concept of multiculturalism, it called for:

- Deepening of the international debate on questions relating to cultural diversity, particularly in respect of its links with development and its impact on policy-making, at both national and international level; taking forward notably consideration of the advisability of an international legal instrument on cultural diversity.
- Advancing of the definition of principles, standards and practices, on both the national and the international levels, as well as of awareness-raising modalities and patterns of cooperation, that are most conducive to the safeguarding and promotion of cultural diversity.
- Fostering of the exchange of knowledge and best practices in regard to cultural pluralism with a view to facilitating, in diversified societies, the inclusion and participation of persons and groups from varied cultural backgrounds.
- Making further headway in understanding and clarifying the content of cultural rights as an integral part of human rights.

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- Safeguarding of the linguistic heritage of humanity and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages.
- Encouraging of linguistic diversity – while respecting the mother tongue – at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age.
- Promotion through education of an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and, to this end, improving both curriculum design and teacher education.
- Incorporation, where appropriate, of traditional pedagogies into the education process, with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge.
- Encouraging of `digital literacy` and ensuring greater mastery of the new information and communication technologies, which should be seen both as educational discipline and as tools capable of enhancing the effectiveness of education.
- Promotion of linguistic diversity in cyberspace and encouraging universal access through the global network to all information in the public domain.
- Encouragement of the production, safeguarding and dissemination of diversified contents in the media and global information networks and, to that end, promoting the role of public radio and television services in the development of audiovisual productions of good quality, in particular by fostering the establishment of cooperative mechanisms to facilitate their distribution.
- Formulation of policies and strategies for the preservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage, notably the oral and intangible cultural heritage, and combating illicit traffic in cultural goods and services.
- Safeguarding and protection of traditional knowledge, in particular that of indigenous peoples; recognising the contribution of traditional knowledge, particularly with regard to environmental protection and the management of natural resources, and fostering synergies between modern science and local knowledge.
- Fostering the mobility of creators, artists, researchers, scientists and intellectuals and the development of international research programmes and partnerships, while striving to preserve and enhance the creative capacity of developing countries and countries in transition.
- Ensuring protection of copyright and related rights in the interest of the development of contemporary creativity and fair remuneration for creative work, while at the same time upholding a public right of access to culture, in accordance with Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Development of cultural policies, including operational support arrangements and/or appropriate regulatory frameworks, designed to promote the principles enshrined in this Declaration, in accordance with the international obligations incumbent upon each State.
- Involvement of all sectors of civil society closely in framing of public policies aimed at safeguarding and promoting cultural diversity.
- Recognition and encouragement for the contribution that the private sector can make to enhancing cultural diversity and facilitating, to that end, the establishment of forums for dialogue between public and private sectors.

The Association congratulates the Committee for linking the issues of settlement, multiculturalism, globalisation, social inclusion and community prosperity.

We note that Australia was criticised at the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Hearings in Geneva early this year. There has been public outcry over the treatment of asylum seekers and a continuing debate over the nation's population sustainability. Significantly, there has been discussion here on multiculturalism following calls to abandon the concept of multiculturalism in some European nations.

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda

Australia is bound by a number of international conventions and agreements covering multiculturalism and social inclusion, which we see as interwoven.

The Association notes that Australia is not a signatory to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families which, significantly includes the rights to:

- Protection against dismissal;
- Unemployment benefits;
- Access to public work schemes intended to combat unemployment;
- Access to alternative employment in the event of loss of work or termination of other remunerated activity.

The Convention calls for respect for the cultural identity of migrant workers and members of their families and provides that signatories shall not prevent them from maintaining their cultural links with their State of origin but may take appropriate measures to assist and encourage efforts towards this.

Clearly Government has a responsibility to build and develop the capacity of individuals and neighbourhoods to develop community initiated responses to local issues and needs. Community groups cover a diverse range of areas, such as sport and recreation, the arts and education and ethnicity and culture. They provide important opportunities for people to connect. This needs to be fully supported.

Multiculturalism means encouraging mutual respect, human rights, cultural expression and social participation, while roadblocks in the way of full participation in society are dealt with under social inclusion. It is critical that the full scope of government be involved in multiculturalism, meaning access and equity, human rights, social inclusion and anti-racism. But this is now restricted to the Departments of Immigration and Citizenship, Attorney General, and Community Services and should, at the minimum, cover education, employment, health, regional development, environment communities and sustainability, communication and the arts.

Social inclusion also includes including maternal and child health, early childhood education, education and skills acquisition, disability rights, labour market access, healthy lifestyles, secure and affordable housing, safe communities, substance abuse avoidance and recovery, and dignified ageing.

Some steps have been taken, but it is still difficult to measure the affect of social inclusion programs on migrants and refugees.

Social exclusion has been seen to include racism in housing and the job market, in the need for educational support, in the failure to have qualifications recognised, in the dilemma of gaining work experience before jobs can be obtained and the marginal and erratic funding of social agencies which aim to help newcomers. An assumption exists that exclusions results from everything from substance abuse to joblessness, ill-health, continuous family unemployment and disability.

It is relevant to note and emphasise that, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there has been a 33% increase in asylum claims in Australia in 2010. However, many other countries have seen a similar surge and overall the numbers were a third lower than the peak levels seen in 2001. According to the UNHCR, *“Australia accounted for **just 2%** of total global claims, and they came from some of the world’s most troubled and conflict-ridden regions”* (emphasis added). (2)

Inclusion should mean more, and as the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council said: *“Our political leaders should have no difficulty in presenting ‘multicultural Australia’ as an important part of the’ national identity’ they frequently invoke. They should consider stressing Australia’s cultural diversity on more occasions than explicitly multicultural ones: and when they do this, they should add that as well as diversity, multiculturalism brings innovation, ideas, skills, energy and achievement and makes us richer in all kinds of ways, including our ‘identity’.”* (3)

Social Inclusion posits exclusion as a consequence of combined forces of joblessness covering generations, long-term sickness or disability, chronic substance abuse, family ‘dysfunction’, and deprivation because of location. The presence of multiculturalism may be only realised when Social Inclusion provides greater employment rates among refugees and others here on humanitarian grounds. The Association notes that a recent survey found that one in four people said they had been subject to discrimination because of their race, ethnicity or national background. Another study found higher levels of depression and other psychological problems among those who suffered discrimination. An education covering the range of backgrounds, culture and history comprising today’s Australia would help in the development of mutual respect and an abhorrence of racism.

Our society is culturally richer through the arts, diet and cuisine, philosophically and spiritual traditions brought from abroad. The wealth derived from migration is self-evident. ‘diversity dividend’: the benefits that accrue to a wider society from living with diversity.

2. The contribution of Diaspora communities to Australia’s relationships with Europe, the UK, Middle East and the immediate Asia-Pacific Region.

An appreciation and understanding of cultural norms and nuances as a result of learning from Diaspora communities should be of enormous benefit. At the Association interns have come and gone over the years to many parts of the world, bringing insights and invaluable knowledge. Our long-term vice-president is based in India and frequently returns to Melbourne. This provides invaluable guidance for some of our external programs.

Settlement and Participation

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3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society.

Neighbourhood and community organisations should be encouraged to provide greater opportunities for people of all backgrounds. It is recommended that:

- The government encourage participation in community life by all members of Australia's diverse population.
- That the government establish a permanent and independent, bi-partisan body to advise and consult on policies and other matters to help frame a national multicultural Australian strategy.

To evaluate this program critical and accurate data is needed about what programs are under way, how the settlement program is proceeding. Migrant Resource Centres should be properly assisted with money and staff.

The Association believes that incentives are needed to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole. Community development provides the best road to independence and full participation in Australia's social, cultural and economic life.

It is recommended that the government establish an anti-racism strategy and adopt the recommendations of the Human Rights Consultations on a community-wide human rights campaign and an education program for all Australians, with particular reference to discrimination, prejudice and racism.

Concerns have been raised about the level of evidence in the policy and public debate over the last decade and half, with the resulting blow to the quality of services. Agencies suggest there has been a paucity of information about innovation in services and difficulty in sharing information on successful strategies for participation and integration. Therefore there is a perceived need for a national research centre to combine the work done in the community and at universities and other research centres. Local and national research projects should be undertaken in order to plan strategies and, importantly, to counter many myths that spring up around multiculturalism.

It is heartening that the Federal Government plans to give a new Australian Multicultural Council the task of overseeing the Access and Equity Strategy. A whole-of-government strategy is envisaged, covering a clear blueprint for each government department and agency, with key performance indicators showing identifying the range of stakeholders to whom they respond.

Suggestions have been made that there should be an Australian Multiculturalism Act. NSW and Victoria have moved in this direction and certainly the Federal Government's failure to take up recommendations of the Brennan Inquiry into a Human Rights Act. A Multiculturalism Act should incorporate the human rights matters covered by the ten UN Conventions and declarations on these issues.

National productive capacity

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5. The role migration has played and contributes to building Australia's long term productive capacity.

The economic benefits of migration program amounts to more than \$11.5 million for every 1,000 permanent migrants, including skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants in 2007–08 figures. The human capital of migration expands national productive capacity by bringing skills that may be in short supply, but agencies note that migrants are often attracted to Australia on the pretext that their knowledge, experience and skills are in demand, only to find a range of formal and informal barriers halt full participation in the workforce. Reasons given include alleged worries that an applicant's training is different or misaligned to the precise needs of a company, or that skills such as English as a second language, or cultural differences may limit a potential applicant's ability to integrate into a workplace.

A recent study highlighted discrimination against applicants on the basis of their names. Some professions bar overseas-trained applicants because their qualifications were not gained in Australia and are therefore not consistent with the education and training in Australia. This is especially so in medicine.

There are legitimate concerns in some professions that overseas qualifications do not fully qualify someone for a job here.

But if knowledge of local laws is needed to do a job, a bridging education program could be introduced.

6. The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants.

The government ought to establish an independent body like the Productivity Commission to monitor the responsiveness of Australian Government services to those disadvantaged by cultural or linguistic barriers, including having rolling audits in crucial policy areas.

Protocols should be set up to consider migrant and cultural needs before some policy and programs were implemented. There is a need for English language courses, employment skills training and other programs to support migrants to settle successfully be properly backed.

7. Potential government initiatives to better assist migrant communities establish business enterprises.

The Association does not wish to make any submissions in relation to this topic.

This Submission was prepared by the United Nations Association of Australia (Victorian Division).

Footnotes

1. *Adopted in Paris on November 2 2001 in the wake of the September 11 outrages in New York.*
2. *UNHCR, 28 March, 2011.*
3. *Statement on cultural diversity by the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, entitled The People of Australia, 30 April 2010.*

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