

SPEECH – Western Sydney University Open Forum – 7th June

2017

Acknowledgements:

Good evening everyone.

- Dr Sev Ozdowski AM, Director, Equity and Diversity, Western Sydney University
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction:

As Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs, it's a pleasure for me to be here to speak about 'Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful'.

Recent terrorism events:

I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak about Multicultural Australia in the context of the new statement as well as in what is a troubling and difficult time around the world with what feels like a new terror attack every week.– In the aftermath of the tragedies that have unfolded in Manchester and London over the past couple of weeks, as well as the bombings in Baghdad, and now closer to home, in Brighton on Monday night, it's more important than ever to affirm our commitment to multicultural Australia – one that is founded on freedom and democracy and an Australia that has no place for people who would attack our values.

As a father, I watched in horror as children and families were caught up in the terror at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester.

Last Sunday came, and just when Manchester was rallying following their tragedy, it was heartbreaking to watch London being caught up in such barbaric acts by such deranged animals.

Then on Monday night in Brighton, Victoria we saw a siege take place where a life was taken and the terrorist was purportedly trying to lure police into a deadly ambush.

Of course, Australia has been no stranger to terrorism in recent times.

10 Australians were killed on September 11. 88 Australians were killed in Bali.

We had the shooting of NSW Police's Curtis Cheng, and the Lindt Café siege.

Tragically it has emerged that two brave Australians were among those killed in the London attacks on the weekend.

Since 12 September 2014, when the national terrorism threat level was raised, 63 people have been charged as a result of 28 counter terrorism operations around Australia.

Since 2001, 39 people have been convicted of terrorism related offences. 21 of these people are currently serving custodial sentences, one of whom is a juvenile.

In addition, there are 42 people currently before the courts for terrorism related offences, six of whom are juveniles.

Since the national terrorism threat level was raised on 12 September 2014, there have been five attacks and twelve major counter-terrorism disruption operations in response to potential attack planning in Australia.

It's important that we call it how we see it. This is the difficult world we now live in.

Our freedom, our values, and in some cases our lives are under threat from barbaric Islamist terrorists – they want to harm us as individuals, our families, our communities, and our way of life.

This is an evil ideology which must be defeated.

Those who believe in this Islamist ideology are a small minority of muslims, but there are still far too many of them

So it's on the majority – including the moderate, peaceful Muslims of our world – to rise up against this.

We need moderate Muslims to be loud in their condemnation in their communities. So why mention this in the context of a speech about multicultural Australia? Because terrorism is a threat to our way of life, including the acceptance of a multicultural Australia which largely exists in Australia today. If we are not successful in defeating Islamist terrorism and the ideology which underpins it, we will become a far less harmonious society than we are today.

And on this I want to make two important points. Survey after survey shows that Australians are strongly supportive of a multicultural Australia. But Australians also reject extremism, and cultural practices which undermine our values. Australians also, I believe, reject attempts by public figures to pretend that Islamist terrorism has nothing to do with religion. We are surely mature enough as a nation to have an open discussion about the inspiration for Islamist terrorism in Wahabist and Salafist teaching, while acknowledging that most muslims in Australia are good citizens who reject this extremism.

Pretending that Islamist terrorists are simply mentally ill and not driven by an extreme ideology is not only dangerous, it is insulting to all Australians, whatever their religious or cultural background.

But in having a reasonable and honest conversation about the inspiration for Islamist terrorism, we must also recognise that we as a nation have often tolerated extremism and violence – through our courts and tribunals in particular.

While the Australian Government works tirelessly to keep Australians safe through strong border protection and through our law enforcement and intelligence agencies, these efforts are undermined by aspects of our justice system which consistently put the rights of offenders ahead of the safety of the community. Soft bail laws, weak sentencing for serious criminal offences, Tribunals who refuse to deport violent criminals and weak parole laws all contribute to making Australians less safe, both from criminal and from potential terrorists.

We know of some of these examples:

- Man Haron Monis was on bail awaiting trial for 40 sex offences and for being an accessory to the murder of his Australian ex-wife when he took hostages in the Lindt Cafe in December 2014.
- Yacqub Khayre, 29, was released on parole on December 8 last year after serving four years and seven months for a string of offences including aggravated burglary and theft and was involved in a plan for a terrorist attack on Holsworthy Barracks.
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal overturned over 80 ministerial deportation orders despite being given detailed evidence of the violent,

sexual and other serious crimes committed by 76 men and five women, allowing them to stay in Australia.

These failures have come from all levels of Government so that means all levels of government, and indeed all parts of the community, have a duty to take up the fight against terrorism and radicalisation. We need to both condemn those who would denigrate us, and also celebrate the things that have made us a great nation.

Together, as Australians – indeed, as the majority of peaceful, free, and law-abiding citizens of the world – we need to drown out the terrorists voices.

As part of this, we must understand that if we are to continue our multicultural success story, we can have no tolerance for behaviour that is contrary to our values. We must use the full force of the law to stop those who are planning and encouraging attacks.

We must resolve to work together, men and women from all cultures and faiths that are united by one thing – being an Australian – to uphold our values and fight back against this evil.

Cultural diversity:

And we must always remember that we do indeed have values worth defending. We are a nation that has flourished because we've worked hard to integrate many different people into a free and prosperous Australia.

From the First Australians, the oldest continuing culture on earth, to British and Irish Settlement and on to the 7.5 million migrants that have arrived since World War II, Australia has flourished with waves of migration.

People from many nations – including my own parents – have come to Australia to create a new home and build a better life.

Today about 45 per cent of us were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was.

We come from about 300 different backgrounds and we speak over 300 different languages, including indigenous languages.

Cultural diversity has enabled migrants to make great contributions to Australia, and Australia is richer for it. It is one of our greatest assets.

I am pleased to note that Western Sydney University is one of the most culturally diverse universities in Australia, with more than 100 cultural and ethnic backgrounds represented in its student community and over 20 per cent of staff coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

We are and should remain a nation built on diverse cultures united by common values – respect, equality and freedom.

These are the values that unite us and provide the foundation for a shared future in which everyone has the opportunity to belong.

Multicultural Statement:

It was with great pride, in this context, that I had the pleasure of jointly releasing the Australian Government's multicultural statement *Multicultural Australia: United, Strong, Successful* with the Prime Minister earlier this year.

The statement sets out our vision for embracing diversity. It emphasises our unique national identity and the importance of being an integrated and united people. Importantly, it acknowledges that every Australian, whether they were born here or elsewhere, has a part to play in our multicultural society.

The new statement outlines the strategic directions and priorities for multicultural policy in this country.

These are to encourage economic and social participation of new arrivals; harness the advantages of our diversity and shared national interest; and continue to build harmonious and socially cohesive communities.

The statement recognises that to strengthen our economy we must support the participation of our new arrivals who bring with them the skills, knowledge, and networks of a diverse workforce.

While the times have changed from when my parents came here, the aspiration of our migrants remains the same – to work hard, learn English, have a secure job and gain a quality education for themselves and their children.

The statement also recognises that the ongoing project of multicultural Australia is not just about new arrivals. It's about all of us embracing the values and freedoms that unite us. There's an element here of mutual obligation – those who have been in Australia for generations welcome new arrivals, and new arrivals integrate and add their unique experiences and skills to build on our successes.

Contributing to the community, building on our prosperity, and creating a more integrated society is something all of us have a responsibility to do.

Government support:

Providing opportunities for all Australians to make a positive contribution to the economic and social life of the nation is critical to maintaining our high levels of social cohesion.

Through the Department of Social Services, the Government delivers an extensive range of programs to support the participation of all Australians and build socially cohesive communities.

The new Humanitarian Settlement Program will begin later this year.

This program merges the existing Humanitarian Settlement Services and Complex Case Support Programs and will work to build skills and knowledge for the social and economic wellbeing of humanitarian entrants.

The new look settlement program will build on the success of the current programs and move towards an outcomes-based delivery framework, with a renewed focus on achieving English language, education and employment outcomes

It will aim to improve linkages to other key Government programs such as the Adult Migrant English Program and jobactive.

The Department is finalising the tender and we are hoping that successful organisations will be announced in the coming months.

The Government also provides programs, services and support.

This includes access to free interpreting services – in more than 160 languages and dialects – to people who don't speak English. Delivered through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS national), this ensures people can access key services, such as medical services.

Through the Adult Migrant English Program, eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants have access to up to 510 hours of free English language tuition. This enables them to participate economically and socially in Australian society.

A Community Hubs program helps to improve opportunities for migrants to connect with support services provided by all levels of government. There are 39 Community Hubs across the country with 30 more due to open over the next three years.

There is funding to peak community bodies, as well as a ministerially appointed council, to provide advice on the views and needs of Australia's multicultural communities and the impact of government policies on these communities.

We also support a network of Multicultural Community Liaison Officers across Australia, to help the Government to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

These officers support communities to strengthen their links to Government, while building independence, as well as social and economic participation in the wider society.

Budget measures:

The Government provides a range of other supports and services to help humanitarian entrants find and secure work or get into study. These include funding community services, projects through annual grants programs.

In the 2016-17 Federal Budget, \$5.2 million was allocated for a three-year Career Pathways Pilot for Humanitarian Entrants.

The Pilot is aimed at assisting newly arrived humanitarian entrants to access employment opportunities that are appropriately suited to their pre-arrival work history.

Strong and Resilient Communities grants:

Funding through the Strong and Resilient Communities grants will support local community organisations.

Community organisations will shortly be able to apply for funding for projects that help build inclusive and resilient communities.

The grants will help strengthen the capacity of communities to become more self-reliant and empowered to address local issues, while increasing a sense of belonging and engagement.

Social cohesion is vital to healthy communities and to national security.

Funding of these grants will boost organisations working in disadvantaged areas with high cultural diversity and low social cohesion levels and where there is a risk of racial, religious or cultural intolerance developing.

Evidence shows that well integrated and cohesive communities are underpinned by a strong sense of community belonging, high-levels of community participation and volunteering, and strong local leadership and engagement.

These grants will enable community organisations to drive projects that build people's skills and capacity to actively engage in their community and improve their chances of getting a job.

This is an important grassroots approach to bringing people in from the margins, establishing community harmony and helping strengthen national security.

Citizenship reforms:

As you'd be aware, the Government is also introducing a package of reforms to strengthen Australian citizenship, including changes to the Australian Values Statement, the Citizenship Test, and the Pledge of commitment.

These reforms will strengthen the requirement for applicants to commit their allegiance to Australia and Australian values and to demonstrate their contribution to the Australian community.

The package of reforms also includes an increased general residence requirement. Applicants will need to demonstrate at least four years of permanent residence in Australia immediately prior to applying for citizenship.

The citizenship test will be strengthened by the introduction of new questions on the Australian values of respect, equality and freedom.

There will be a new stand-alone English language test. Applicants will need to demonstrate a competent level of English language skills before applying for citizenship.

English language:

English language proficiency is one of three priority areas for the Australian Government, alongside education and employment.

English language skills are crucial in a migrant's settlement journey.

Proficiency in English builds confidence and empowers individuals to independently participate in their community – leading to enhanced social participation, self-sufficiency and a sense of belonging.

In the long term, this results in greater wellbeing, greater social and economic engagement and lower reliance on government services.

As Australia's economy shifts from a manufacturing base to a services based economy, English language skills are increasingly important, both from an economic perspective and from participation and social cohesion perspectives.

The Government will introduce the new citizenship related legislation into the Parliament by the end of 2017.

Security:

Underpinning a diverse and harmonious Australia is the security of our nation. As I mentioned at the beginning, we are not isolated from terrorism.

The safety and security of all Australians is the Australian Government's highest priority. The Government responds to these threats by continuing to invest in counter-terrorism, strong borders and strong national security.

These measures ensure that Australia remains an open, inclusive, free and safe society.

In the face of these threats, there is no better time to reaffirm our steadfast commitment to democracy, opportunity, and our shared values.

The citizenship reforms are integral to Australia's future as a strong and successful multicultural nation, united by our allegiance to Australia and commitment to freedom and prosperity.

Addressing irregular migration through secure borders is essential in creating confidence that the Government can manage migration in a way that mitigates risks and focuses humanitarian assistance on those who need it most.

Public confidence in the way we manage migration has created capacity to offer a generous Humanitarian Program.

In 2016-17, Australia will grant the largest number of offshore humanitarian visas in more than 30 years.

This will include many of the visas granted under the additional allocation of 12,000 places for people displaced by conflict in Syria and Iraq.

The ongoing Humanitarian Program will increase to 16,250 places in 2017-18 and to 18,750 places in 2018-19.

Conclusion:

Our cultural diversity is reflected in our past, celebrated in our present and it will continue to be our strength into the future.

But we must remember that our success as a cohesive and integrated society is no accident. We worked on it in the past and we must continue to work on it in the future.

In the shadow of terrorism we must strengthen our response to radicalisation and extremism. We must have no tolerance for those who would foster attitudes and practices contrary to the Australian way of life. As we move forward, we celebrate our success as a multicultural nation together, and we build on this – focusing not on the differences that divide us but on the shared values and freedoms which unite us.

Together we are united, strong, and successful as a multicultural nation.

Thank you.