



Harmony Day message to staff

21 March 2019

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Secretary, Department of Home Affairs**

A Home Where Everyone Belongs

Today we celebrate our twin strengths of unity and diversity, and the values which unify the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious communities which make up our nation.

Tragically, we also continue to grieve for the victims of the unspeakable act committed last Friday (15 March) in Christchurch, New Zealand, against innocent Muslims at prayer. While it does not lessen the shock, we are uplifted by the fact that, irrespective of race, culture, faith or creed, so many on both sides of the Tasman have come together with messages of unity and compassion, and have voiced a powerful rejection of racism and hate. There has been a universal outpouring of sympathy and prayers for the victims, and their loved ones, as well as expressions of solidarity with Muslim communities in New Zealand and Australia.

It falls to all in positions of authority and influence to call out and reject the vile and odious ideology of extremist white supremacist nationalism. Regrettably, it lurks in our midst, seeking its chance to once again come forth from the abyss to menace our peace and unity. Three decades ago, as a university student taking a major in Modern Europe History, I studied European Fascism between the World Wars. It was a chilling experience. The 1920s and the 1930s saw the rise of Fascism in Italy, and elsewhere in Europe, and Nazism in Germany. We should never forget how in the centre of European civilisation there arose demagogic politics, the irrational mysticism and symbology of the fascists, the vilification of minorities, and the mobilisation of violent hatred – which led ultimately to the ‘final solution’ of the Holocaust, a crime against humanity which must be never forgotten, and never repeated, until the end of time. In this case, forgetting is not acceptable, and cannot be excused. This evil did not arise in the face of apathy and indifference. It was able to tap racism, and translate supposed political and cultural grievances into perverted ideas and actions, in plain sight, and gaining power in the face of weak or non-existent resistance.

Compared with those dark days, today our societies are stronger and more cohesive. Economic opportunities are more widespread. More is done to counter extremism. We must remain vigilant, lest the personal fixations and the supposed disempowerment and loss of identity which are exploited by such groups, and translated into political support, form the basis for a revival of fascism on a more widespread basis. We owe it to the victims of last week’s attack to redouble our efforts against the proponents of this ideology here and abroad, in partnership with all who value the dignity and worth of all, whereby the stranger is not ‘the Other’, shorn of humanity, vilified and reviled.

I am proud to lead a Department which is, with our colleagues across the portfolio, in the vanguard of the fight against extremist ideologies. We do so by managing a non-discriminatory immigration and citizenship programme, promoting social cohesion, countering violent extremism, coordinating national counter-terrorism efforts, and more besides. I would ask that across the Department today we rededicate ourselves to standing firm against all forms of intolerance, hatred and racial vilification; and to guarding against the incitement to violence which is often found within extremist viewpoints, irrespective of their ideological or supposedly religious rationale.

We must also stand against the revival of ancient hatreds and their promulgation through the ungoverned space of social media platforms. For too long the digital industrial complex has sought to have us believe that connectivity can exist in a value-free world. It cannot. It is well past time for values to guide the online world, and for accountability to be accepted by its self-interested proponents. The global community, including world leaders, must come together to ensure that technology companies, which are richly endowed with innovative capabilities and rapid development processes and systems, do more to meet their global corporate responsibility obligations to protect the very communities that they say they serve, and from which they reap such stupendous riches.

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I have made a point of reflecting in all of my Australia Day messages (2015-2019) on the difference between an inclusive open nationalism and its exclusive, insular antithesis. As I said in my 2015 message, for all of our achievements as a nation before the 1970s, we would never have become a "more complete commonwealth" had we clung to the conception of Australia as being 'Britain beyond the seas'. For nearly two centuries, Australians saw themselves as members of the global family of 'the white race'. One of the first Acts of the new Commonwealth Parliament in 1901 was an Act to restrict immigration, which formed the basis of the 'White Australia' policy. Before the 1970s, we built walls to insulate ourselves from the outside world, and especially the region around us.

Imagine what would have been our standing in the world today had we sought to preserve those walls and that insularity? If we had not cast off the anxiety about Asia. If this Department was still required to ensure that Australia remained 'white'? Today we recognise that for all of the beneficial inheritance that is ours as a result of our modern British origins, we would never have become the modern Australia without the dismantling of White Australia, and the reversal of discrimination in immigration (which was only finally achieved in the early 1970s, almost a decade after I was born, the son of Italian immigrants). Or had we not undertaken the remarkable programme of mass immigration and settlement after the Second World War.

In my 2016 message, I wrote that our diversity has laid the foundations of our national outlook as a confident and internationally engaged people. Australia's success as a multicultural society challenges the very idea that citizens of a nation-state have to share a singular identity that is grounded in culture, race or belief. Our nation nurtures active social participation and shared national values, while being mutually respectful and tolerant of our diverse identities. Long may all participate equitably in our society, with a full appreciation of the rights and responsibilities that come with membership of that society.

In my 2017 message, I wrote that a nation is not an arbitrary geographical construct that happens to be inhabited at any one time by randomly selected individuals who lack any prior connections or

common history. The very idea of 'the nation' implies continuities in terms of common identity, the durability and strength of institutions, as well as expectations of mutual trust and recognition, and common allegiance. Each of us carries a shared heritage, history and identity. Our national biography contains many chapters, some dating back thousands of years, some a few hundred, and some, of course, yet to be written. Australians are not given to highly symbolic expressions of nationalism, and the pomp and ceremony that is found in some other national cultures. Our national culture is not reproduced in every generation on the basis of some deep historical enmity which is held against another people, and where the sorrows of long and violent grudges are ingrained into the collective consciousness and passed from one generation to the next. Our nationalism is a civic compact, and not a racial or cultural one. Our civic compact is expressed as loyalty to the community, and allegiance to the sovereignty of the people, as expressed through our institutions of governance.

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In recognition of the many events celebrating inclusiveness which are taking place during the week 17-23 March, from this year on, the Department will support the celebration of 'Harmony Week', with a focus on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, held annually on 21 March. The theme of Harmony Week is "Everybody Belongs". Today, we welcome all to our shores, subject only to their willingness to observe our laws and identify with our values. Our nationalism is inclusive. It is founded on the proper conception of the idea of nation, and not on the perverted idea of an exclusive nation of 'blood and soil'.

As you all know, our principal job is to protect our home, and to contribute to an Australia that is prosperous, secure and united. On this Harmony Day, let us ensure that we are all working to protect a home where "Everybody Belongs".