



The Ethnic Schools Association of South Australia Inc.

Patron:
Mr Hieu Van Le
Lieutenant Governor of South Australia

**Australian Parliament
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Submission No. 123**

7 April 2011

Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Hearn,

Thank you for your letter of 18 February, 2011 giving The Ethnic Schools Association of SA Inc. an opportunity to comment on Multiculturalism in Australia.

Now enclosed please find the Association's submission addressing: "The Role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda", which is of particular concern to us in light of the current misconceptions espoused in the community at large.

Yours sincerely,

Jude Nirmalaraja,
Chairperson.



The Ethnic Schools Association of South Australia Inc.

Patron:
Mr Hieu Van Le
Lieutenant Governor of South Australia

SUBMISSION

TO INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

BACKGROUND

The Ethnic Schools Association of SA Inc. is a non-profit community organisation representing the South Australian ethnic schools sector. As well, it is non-political and non-sectarian in nature.

The membership of the Association comprises 97 ethnic schools authorities teaching 47 different languages to a student enrolment of 7,695 and includes playgroups, pre-school, primary, secondary and adult class levels.

The Mission Statement of the Association is that member ethnic school authorities have the right to maintain, develop, express and share their linguistic and cultural heritages.

The primary aim of The Ethnic Schools Association of SA Inc. is “to promote activities for the development and benefit of ethnic schools” and this it does by providing education and administrative support to its affiliated member ethnic schools.

MULTICULTURALISM, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND GLOBALISATION

1. The Role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government’s social inclusion agenda

The United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights state that everyone is entitled to rights without distinction or discrimination on account of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin.

Today’s attacks on multiculturalism are based on it being viewed as divisive in the sense that Australia is creating ghettos of tribes non-supportive of the Australian way of life. To support this view sentiments expressed are racist, anti-religious and lacking in tolerance.

What is overlooked is that when multiculturalism came into being it was stressed that “multiculturalism is about diversity, not division – it

is about interaction and not isolation. It is about cultural and ethnic differences set within the framework of shared fundamental values which enables them to co-exist on a complementary rather than competitive basis". (Malcolm Fraser 1981).

Such a framework of shared fundamental values envisaged that there be respect for the institutions and principles which are basic to Australian society, including:

- parliamentary democracy;
- the rule of law;
- equality before the law;
- freedom of the individual;
- freedom of speech;
- freedom of the press;
- freedom of religion;
- equality of women;
- and, universal education with English being the language of the nation.

The Australian Government's new multicultural policy "The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy" espouses that the policy "embraces our shared values and cultural traditions" and is "built around shared rights and responsibilities".

While those statements are expressed in the policy they get lost in the reading. They are expressed as general comments rather than fundamental values, rights and responsibilities.

This, in our opinion, is one of the reasons why confusion has arisen in today's society. The public at large does not have a clear understanding anymore of what the original concept of multiculturalism entailed, because governments at national level have stopped emphasising that a multicultural policy and its principles are embedded in an overarching framework of shared fundamental values as listed above. Consequently, individuals and groups are giving their own interpretations to parts or all of the policy as can be seen and heard in the media today.

While the document, "The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy", in itself is of value, it should be enhanced by an unambiguous opening statement of an overarching framework of the shared values referred to earlier. Such a framework would then eliminate individual interpretations and slants on what the policy and its principles are about in its precise meaning.

Concluding, we would mention that the other issues being addressed by the inquiry are not related to the aims and purpose of The Ethnic Schools Association of SA Inc.