

The Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
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Submission No. 47

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The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP
Chairman
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Ms Bishop

BY:.....

Thank you for your letter of 27 June 2002 about the Committee's inquiry into *Crime in the community: victims, offenders and fear of crime*.

Crime is one of those issues with enormous ripple effects. Not only are the lives of perpetrators and victims affected but their family members also often feel the impact. On some occasions, unfortunately, this impact can lead to long-term debilitating effects that not only bring great sadness to those involved but are also extremely costly to society.

The reference to the Committee by the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator the Hon Chris Ellison, is especially timely from the perspective of my portfolio. There has been extensive media coverage over the past twelve months both of the trials and convictions of a number of young men of Lebanese Muslim background who were responsible for the gang rape of several young women in western Sydney. These trials have also raised such sensitive issues in New South Wales as the length of sentences in cases of this nature and whether the names of juvenile offenders should be made public and, if so, when that should occur.

Unfortunately, some of the media coverage of these matters has tended to focus on the ethnicity and religious backgrounds of the offenders. While there can be no excuse for criminal behaviour of any kind and the perpetrators of these horrendous crimes deserve whatever sentences the criminal justice system imposes on them, it is quite wrong to suggest that any crime has specific ethnic or religious characteristics. There is no evidence, either in Australia or overseas, supporting such a link. On the contrary, Australia's ethnic communities are equally as concerned about crime as any other section of Australian society. What happens with the focus on ethnicity or religious background is that entire migrant or religious communities tend to be blamed for the aberrant behaviour of a few individual members. Such blaming is just completely wrong and at odds with the Australian sense of a 'fair go'.

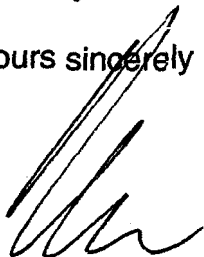
Criminologists, in fact, claim that the link is not between ethnicity (or religion) and crime but rather between crime and disadvantage. Socio-economic issues, social dislocation, and, for recently-arrived Australians particularly, novel problems caused by new situations – such as inter-generational conflict – do seem to be key issues. My Department seeks to ease the difficult task for new Australians of adjusting to life in a new society. It provides a wide range of services – English language training, settlement packages, values education at the time of arrival and later through initiatives under the *New Agenda for Multicultural Australia* and in relation to citizenship. The aim is to assist new arrivals to adjust to life in Australia as quickly as possible. Migrants do participate successfully in Australian society, with social and economic outcomes broadly similar to the Australian-born population.

As suggested, I have referred the papers about the inquiry to my Electorate Office in case some of my constituents would be interested in writing a submission. I have also asked my Department to keep a watching brief on the inquiry in relation to those matters that impact on my portfolio.

I look forward to seeing the Committee's recommendations in due course.

Thank you for bringing the inquiry to my attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Philip Ruddock', written in a cursive style.

Philip Ruddock