

Federal Inquiry into Multiculturalism.

Ms Maria Vamvakinou.

I believe that I am very fortunate to live within the borders of Australia. We have a democratic and overwhelming Christian society. The Christian principles have made our society what it is today. Many folk who have migrated here have done so because of the Christian basis of our beliefs which evidence themselves in programmes like self help workshops, denominational aged care homes, organisations which give financial, physical and spiritual support in the community like St Vincent de Paul, the City Mission and the Salvation Army, Scripture Union which organises school, hospital and prison chaplaincy programmes.

Many of the local churches are directly involved with the recent influx of migrant families from Africa, helping with language, schooling, food, finances, clothing, accommodation and emotional support in those early days as folks settle down.

When the first Vietnamese boat people were admitted into Launceston in Tasmania, 30 years ago, our church sponsored several families. It took several years of support, before these folk settled down and had productive jobs in our local community. I befriended several women my age and 1 family in particular who we still keep in contact with. We met regularly to help them practice language skills and sort out any trouble they had with schooling, shopping, learning another trade, raising their children and having our children play with theirs. In my opinion, if it was left to the government to provide these services there would be very little done and certainly be ineffective.

These were basically Buddhist folk, many of whom now have placed their children in private Christian schools to receive the best educations possible, kind of ironic! Their children are well adjusted, not because our community bent over backwards to try to make a mini Vietnam, but because we helped them through the tough days of adjustment learning the language, getting over the culture shock as they shifted from an antagonistic society to an Australian more healthy way of thinking. It was wonderful to see them re evaluate their beliefs and sort through what really did matter to their families here, to see what was appropriate now, and leave the hindrances of their past lives behind.

Australia has a great spirit of mateship but this spirit is threatened with migrants who do not want to fit in with the majority of people in the community in which they settle and remain in their own ethnic group, unassimilated. They come to Australia to become an Australian; if they thought that there were not changes to be made in their thinking, then we have sadly disillusioned them. They have moved away from their own country and its government and its belief systems, often because it has failed them and they are looking for something better and safer and fairer. And they will find it here.

I am happy for people to become citizens of this great country, but that entails fitting in with our Christian heritage, not trying to change our heritage to fit their beliefs. I believe we have a far superior kind of democracy because it is not a watered down mix of many belief systems. We believe all people are equal, but all lifestyles and cultures are not equal. Australia has something fantastic to offer immigrants and I don't want to see it changed by trying to adjust what we already have, to suit the needs of some other small group who complain they are not being accepted. We don't need to adjust to their needs; they need to be

encouraged to think things through and work out more effective ways of fitting in with fellow Australians.

Evidence from Europe suggests that multiculturalism is not the answer. Assimilation is.

Yours sincerely,