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Opening Address

**THE CHALLENGES OF IMMIGRATION & INTEGRATION
IN AUSTRALIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

I am delighted to be here this morning to give the opening address at this very significant conference. I congratulate the Multicultural Research Centre of the University of Sydney and the National Europe Centre and Centre for Population Research of the Australian National University for organising such an important conference and inviting so many eminent speakers to give presentations on a wide range of vital issues.

The Council for Multicultural Australia has a direct interest in a number of these issues and while others do not form its core business, the Council is, nevertheless, aware of their importance to a multicultural Australia.

I look forward to this morning's sessions and regret that I am unable to attend the entire conference. I look forward, however, to reading the papers covering the remainder of the conference.

Today I will speak briefly about:

- Migration and its benefits
- Australian multiculturalism,
- the work of the Council for Multicultural Australia,
- Community Harmony, and
- Citizenship.

MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

Australia has a long tradition of immigration. Indeed, Australia has been built on settlement from other countries. In many ways this has determined the very nature of contemporary Australian society, with the six million migrants who have come

to Australia since World War II representing 150 different nationalities, 200 different languages and more than 70 religions.

I am advised that Australia's migration program this financial year will be the largest in over a decade with 100,000 to 110,000 places, 58% of these for skilled migrants.

Australia also takes significant numbers of refugee and humanitarian entrants each year. Under its offshore humanitarian program, Australia expects to resettle more than 12,000 people from many parts of the world this financial year. This year the focus is on Africa, the Middle East and South-West Asia although, of course, we also resettle significant numbers of people from Europe and elsewhere.

Settlement Programs

The process of immigration doesn't end once a new arrival sets foot on our shores. Settlement programs, managed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), contribute enormously to the successful adjustment of migrants to Australia by assisting them to become full and active participants in Australia's democratic society.

I am aware that these services include: English language training through the Adult Migrant English Program, translating and interpreting through the Translating and Interpreting Service, and settlement support, information, referral and outreach services through DIMIA's Community Settlement Services Scheme, and the national network of 34 Migrant Resource Centres and Agencies. A senior DIMIA officer will discuss these services in detail later in the Conference.

THE BENEFITS OF MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

It is widely recognised that migrants have made, and are still making, a vast contribution to Australian society. This contribution is manifold, but for the purposes of today's discussion I will divide that contribution into two categories – economic and social benefits.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Research strongly supports that when a migration program has the right balance between skilled, family and humanitarian migrants and between age groups, there is significant economic reward to the community in demand for goods and services, increased jobs and so on.

Cultural diversity is an economic force to be reckoned with – it's good for business, and for the community. This has given rise to the term “productive diversity”.

Productive diversity recognises the *economic* value of Australia's culturally diverse society.

The CMA has played an active role, along with DIMIA, in promoting productive diversity to the Australian business community.

Some of Australia's leading companies, such as:

- AMP,
- Ford,
- Bristol-Myers, and
- Alcoa,

have begun to identify new and innovative ways of drawing on the diversity of the Australian people to ensure Australia's competitiveness in a progressively more aggressive domestic and global marketplace.

The CMA has supported the development of a diversity and sustainability project involving these four companies.

Productive diversity means that companies can draw on their employees' knowledge of overseas business networks and practices, their linguistic and cultural skills, and their understanding of the particular needs and consumer preferences of groups within the domestic market, to gain a competitive edge.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Cultural diversity is one of the greatest benefits of immigration to Australia.

As a result of the many experiences that its people have brought to this country, Australia has become an extraordinarily cosmopolitan society.

Should one examine the curricula of any of our schools, universities or colleges of adult education, there is to be seen the rich bounty of our diversity reflected in the languages, customs and histories that are available for study.

One merely has to walk through the dining precinct in any Australian city to appreciate how so many cuisines from so many places are now considered part of the nation's diet.

Today's skilled migrants are younger than those of earlier generations, have better English language skills and hold qualifications that are in national shortage.

They bring new ideas, skills, technology, understanding and contacts. They are reducing skill shortages, helping develop new businesses, contributing to

technological development and enhancing our knowledge of international business markets.

AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURALISM

Australia is a multicultural country and is one of the world's most culturally diverse countries. Between us we speak over 200 languages – including 45 Indigenous languages.

Migration over the last 200 years has built on the diversity that already existed in this country's Indigenous population to deliver the reality of our modern, multicultural community. Over that period of time, the way we view migrants has changed.

Where 30 years ago we sought simply to acknowledge and accommodate recent migrants, we now, rightly, emphasise the benefits that we can derive from the full spectrum of our diverse people.

But Australian multiculturalism is more than simply an acknowledgment that Australians come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds:

- it recognises, celebrates and values Australia's cultural diversity which has helped shape and enrich Australian culture and social institutions;
- it promotes social cohesion because it accepts and respects the rights of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy; and
- it envisages that individuals and groups can participate fully in the economic, social and political life of Australian society without losing their distinctiveness.

It must be said, therefore, that we have embraced multiculturalism and, as a result, the diversity of our population has delivered us benefits in creating a vital and thriving community and economy.

In Australia, multiculturalism has evolved into a process of respect for the contribution each person brings to Australia whatever their cultural background.

The key to Australian multiculturalism is the aim of ensuring that Australians of all backgrounds have an overriding commitment to Australia's democratic foundations and legal structures. This means our society maintains a balance of rights, privileges and responsibilities, which is emphasised by Australian citizenship.

Allow me, at this point to explain the advent and purpose of the Council for Multicultural Australia (CMA).

THE COUNCIL FOR MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

The CMA was established in July 2000. I am the Chairman of the Council which comprises 17 prominent members, from all States and Territories, and from a variety of backgrounds.

The primary role of the CMA is to assist the Commonwealth Government in implementing its multicultural policy, *a New Agenda for Multicultural Australia*, with a focus on raising awareness and understanding of multiculturalism.

Our three key objectives are:

- ◆ to promote inclusiveness – ensuring that Australians understand that multiculturalism is relevant to, and inclusive of, all Australians,
- ◆ to promote the benefits of productive diversity – ensuring that we all act to maximise the social and economic dividends of our diversity and to promote its benefits, and

- ◆ to promote community harmony – ensuring that Australians acknowledge Australia’s success as a harmonious and culturally diverse nation and work to bolster community harmony.

Our vision is of:

“a united and harmonious Australia, built on the foundations of Australian democracy, and developing our continually evolving nationhood by recognising, embracing, valuing and investing in our heritage and cultural diversity”.

CMA ACTIVITIES

Council members and the CMA as a whole have been actively engaged in promoting multiculturalism throughout the country:

- The CMA as a whole has met on 10 occasions during which we have had some very frank, lively and constructive discussion.
- We’ve met with the Prime Minister, Premiers and Ministers to promote the Council and Australian multiculturalism.
- We’ve consulted and met with over 200 key individuals, committees, and private and public organisations.
- Our public information strategy involves media releases, a national newsletter and meeting with strategic community and professional groups.
- Council members also meet regularly with community organisations throughout the country.

The CMA has established partnerships and collaborations with groups like:

- ◆ Surf Life Saving Australia;
- ◆ NSW Guides;
- ◆ the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau;
- ◆ the Australian Human Resources Institute;

- ◆ Reconciliation Australia;
- ◆ Rotary; and
- ◆ the RSL.

CMA members actively engage with communities across Australia. We work closely with the Government listening to communities and encouraging programs which foster and develop inclusiveness and community harmony.

COMMUNITY HARMONY

After the terrorist attacks in Bali on 12 October last year, Australians faced the challenge of maintaining community harmony.

Significant negative reactions to the terrorist bombings in Bali included increased concern among Muslim communities, as well as anti-Muslim sentiment and actions. The current situation in the Middle East, in particular in Iraq, has also caused a great deal of distress for Middle Eastern and Muslim Australians.

Australian political leaders condemned the attacks in Bali and have commented extensively on the situation in Iraq. In doing so, they also expressed their support for Muslims and Iraqis living in Australia. I offer the following examples from speeches and Press Releases by the Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard, and the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Gary Hardgrave:

“I implore all members of this House to get on with the important business of offering a sense of outreach and support to, in particular, those people from Iraq, but also to those from the Arab-speaking communities and, indeed, the Muslim communities in this country. It is critical that we offer them a sense of support and welcome, and all Australians have a role to play in this regard”.

- 11 February 2003, Gary Hardgrave to the House of Representatives Main Committee, Ministerial Statements on Iraq.

“Muslims in Australia have played an important part in ensuring Australia is regarded as one of the world's most cohesive and harmonious nations.

“This has been a difficult year for many Australians of different backgrounds. However, people have worked together...to seek to maintain community harmony in Australia. I thank the leadership of the Muslim community for the genuine part played in ensuring ongoing community harmony despite the efforts of a few who have attempted to spread division”.

- 6 December 2002, Gary Hardgrave in a Press Release marking Eid - Ul-Fitr (the End Of Ramadan).

and:

“Australia is home to several hundred thousand people of Middle Eastern background. We welcomed them..., and we appreciate their contribution to our nation. Many of them could be torn between seeing Saddam [Hussein] brought to account and the possible dangers facing their families back in Iraq. During this time, they will need our compassion and our support. All Australians should ensure that this is offered”.

- 4 February 2003, Prime Minister, Statement to Parliament on Iraq.

LIVING IN HARMONY

The social benefits of multiculturalism come from having a harmonious community, without the debilitating effects of discrimination and civil strife.

To this end, the CMA also advises on the Commonwealth Government's *Living in Harmony* program.

Rather than impose solutions, the *Living in Harmony* program challenges Australians to lead by example by recognising that communities are best placed to identify local problems and to know how to address them.

Community grants are the centrepiece of this program. They provide funds for projects to solve local problems where they occur, and combat racism at the grass roots.

The Council plays an important role in the *Living in Harmony* initiative by promoting the grants program to community organisations and assisting in the assessment of applications for these grants.

Living in Harmony projects bring people together to share information about themselves, their cultures and foster mutual understanding.

Through the program, people who may not have had anything to do with each other previously are finding that not only do they share a common humanity, but common values and a common commitment to Australia's growth and development as a harmonious nation.

HARMONY DAY

Harmony Day is a key part of the *Living in Harmony* program and is celebrated on 21 March. It will highlight the way Australia has embraced its diverse cultural make-up to produce a productive, progressive and harmonious community.

Harmony Day coincides with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Harmony Day celebrations have grown in size and national significance since it started in 1999.

Each year Harmony Day provides Australians with an opportunity to:

- think about our community's success as a multicultural society;
- recommit to continuing respect, good will and understanding between all Australians of all backgrounds; and
- say no to racism.

The key theme for Harmony Day 2003 is You + Me = Us.

Harmony Day is more than just one day. It is a series of community-based events occurring throughout February and March.

Harmony Day is a community event where all Australians and communities can show their support for the traditional Australian values of justice, equality, fairness, friendship and living in harmony.

The Council works very closely with DIMIA's Multicultural Affairs Branch, along with groups and individuals throughout Australia, to promote Harmony Day and develop ideas for activities.

The success of Harmony Day is due to enormous community support and it is growing each year, with 2003 expected to be the biggest yet.

CITIZENSHIP

This year, along with many of my colleagues on the Council, I had the honour of being made a Citizenship Ambassador. In this role we represented the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Gary Hardgrave MP, at citizenship ceremonies in most states and territories on Australia Day.

On Australia Day this year, nearly 8,400 people took out Australian citizenship in 236 ceremonies throughout Australia. The candidates came from more than 140 countries and the citizenship ceremonies ranged from large ceremonies in capital cities to smaller ceremonies in parks and on beaches throughout Australia.

The taking out of Australian citizenship is perhaps the 'ultimate' step for new arrivals. It marks the conclusion of the immigration journey and the beginning of life as a new member of the Australian family, with all the responsibilities and privileges that this entails. This can only enhance their sense of belonging; and more broadly, it can only enhance the cohesion and harmony of the society in which we live.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Australian society has been built on the fundamental principles of fairness and decency and the premise that opportunity should be equally available to all, regardless of background, gender, race or religion.

These values have formed an essential foundation on which Australia has been able to be transformed into one of the world's most successful, culturally-diverse, democratic, national communities.

Australians have every reason to be proud of our accomplishments as a multicultural nation. Australian multiculturalism will continue to contribute towards Australian development, based firmly on the foundation of our democratic system and respect for Australia law.

Australia has reaped rich rewards from migration throughout its history. Migration will continue to play an important role in our future.

I wish you all the best for a successful conference.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak with you today.