



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

**MULTIFAITH COMMUNITIES, HARMONY
DAY & MULTICULTURALISM**

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sometimes in those cases, people have been comfortable to finally say, 'Enough is enough. I need help from a service or government.'

Do not just think about the statistics as way to pointscore. That is on both sides; I am not saying that one side is guilty and the other is not. We all need to be mindful when we are talking about statistics that we are talking about people and the experiences that people have been through. It is incredibly important that we do not lose sight of that. As the statistics get worse because people feel comfortable to say, 'Enough is enough', let us not use that against them or perpetuate the stigma that is attached to women in our community when they finally come forward.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, over the last month a lot of us have enjoyed engaging in several events that celebrate our diversity, and I thought that was worth reflecting upon briefly tonight.

On 14 February we had a huge interfaith reception next door, which was a celebration of the NT's multi-faith communities. There were 60-odd groups represented and it was a huge tapestry of the world all in one room.

It was a privilege to be the emcee, on behalf of the Chief Minister, and to introduce the guest speaker, Imam Adama Konda, who I grew up with. He is a man from Burkina Faso, of all places. Try to find that on a map. He was one of many multi-faith leaders who spoke well and very kindly on that day, including Bishop Charles Gauci, Father Christos Tsoraklidis, Mr Gurkkal and Dr Edwin Joseph, the multicultural president. There was great wisdom shared from all of them.

There are several other events I could go through in the same vein. I will not go through them all forensically, because I want to draw attention to the bigger picture. There were a couple of things that I think we all delighted in. People have been celebrating a number of things to do with Ramadan, which this year neatly coincides with Lent, making it easier for people across the spectrum to all suffer in silence together, exercise self-restraint and be mindful of trying to do good.

On 9 March many of my colleagues and I—in fact, many of us in this room, across parties—were at the United Muslims of Northern Territory Interfaith Iftar event at the Hilton, which was lovely. I ate my fill that night. Likewise, just this weekend we were at the Islamic Society of Darwin Grand Iftar in Casuarina, which was a lovely celebration. It was lovely to see so many people of different faiths all breaking bread together.

There have been so many different Holi events that I do not know which one to pick, but everyone has delighted in being able to play Holi, throw the colours around, get out there and get mucky. For anyone who has been wondering, the reason I am not there is that I am allergic to half the dyes. I found out the hard way several times over. I am no longer allowed to get coloured in colours; I will turn out in hives. It was a phenomenal opportunity for everyone to come together, particularly to celebrate our growing Nepalese community which is now shooting up the ranks as one of the most numerous ethnic groups represented in the Northern Territory.

Last week, on 19 March, we had a massive Harmony Day celebration outside. Everybody was resplendent in orange. On 21 March, on Harmony Day itself, a number of you will have attended different things across the Territory. I was lucky enough to go to the ARRCs (Australian Regional and Remote Community Services) group, which had a little gathering. It was fantastic to celebrate Harmony Day with other people.

The thing that binds all this together—this is the point I want to make—is we are not a multicultural nation by accident; there is something underlying all of this. Behind all the costumes, colour, food and saying how wonderful diversity is, lies effort. It is worth remembering that because it is not something we should take for granted.

Our First Nations people are the original inhabitants who provided multicultural experiences in many ways, engaging with people across shores. For 65,000 years ATSI people have sustained many cultures and more than 250 languages on this continent. If we fast-forward to the post-World War II era, from 1945 to 2024 we welcomed 7.5 million immigrants, which included almost one million of them as refugees and people in humanitarian need. More than half of the Australian population was born overseas or has at least one parent who was born overseas and 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home. They are the foundations of the diversity in this Chamber. It is worth remembering that we go back a long way in that regard.

It was not until 1973 that the White Australia policy was removed, which was not that long ago. Think about what that was—a policy that excluded non-European immigration. During that period immigrants were expected to leave their cultures and languages behind. Forget your Laksa Festival; it was a different time.

In the 1960s and 1970s we started to move forward and question whether that was necessary, and wanted to be a more inclusive country, probably from 1973 onwards. Al Grassby, the Immigration minister in the Whitlam government, was the first person to release a paper called 'A multi-cultural society for the future'. It presented a bold vision of a society that embraced cultural difference while fostering unity, and marks the beginning of our formal recognition of multiculturalism as a strength of our society.

In 1975 at a ceremony proclaiming the *Racial Discrimination Act* in Parliament House, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam first referred to Australia as a multicultural society. He was supported in the speeches that surrounded that by the Leader of the Opposition at the time.

In 1977 we had the Ethnic Affairs Council advise the Fraser government. It recommended a public policy, finally, on multiculturalism in its report, *Australia as a Multicultural Society*. In 1978 the Fraser government implemented the first official national multicultural policy. That was only 45 years ago. It is not that long that we have had multiculturalism. That is the reality of it. That was in accordance with the recommendations of the Galbally report.

In 1979 we had an Act of parliament establishing the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs. In 1986 that was repealed by the Hawke government, but then replaced in 1987 by the Office of Multicultural Affairs which was created in the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to give it proper weight and gravitas and to recognise that multiculturalism belonged as a central concern of government within its central agency.

In 1989 the Hawke government produced the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, which had bipartisan support. In 1996 the OMA (Office of Multicultural Affairs) was absorbed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs under the Howard government. The Howard government, likewise, launched its report in 1999, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness*.

I will not cover the period between 2000 and the present day—the last 25 years—because it is not necessary in the sense that there have been some policy shifts, but basically there has been bipartisan support for multiculturalism across Australia over that time. However, there have been challenges, and multiculturalism has been threatened at times. We live in tumultuous times and a time of global turmoil and instability, fragmentation and politics being driven to extremes on both edges. We live in relative harmony here, and we take it for granted to a large extent.

It is great that we have the Chung Wah Society with the lions, the Laksa Festival and the events that we have, but do not forget these were all hard-fought and won gains. It would not take much to erode them. It does not take much for social fragmentation to occur. When people are economically and socially stressed—which I think it is fair to say they are in the Northern Territory now—that is when stuff kicks off.

It is important that we, as Members of the Legislative Assembly, fight for multiculturalism. It is not just a word; it is an ethic, and it deserves being fought for in my opinion. The point I make is that it is also a policy commitment, which is why I gave that exhaustive documented history, if you like. The policy was also hard-fought and won over time, and it requires attention, nurturing and a genuine ongoing commitment to ensure that it does not crumble in our face.

I was lucky when I first went to the UK to study for my PhD to work for a gentleman called Professor Ceri Peach. The late Emeritus Professor Guthlac Ceri Klaus Peach was a professor of social geography and an adviser to numerous British governments over a long time about British white people and Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus getting along and not getting along. This was a guy who advised government on social cohesion and what ends up happening if you do not put in place the right policy settings and you do not defend those rights. He wrote extensively about race riots as well.

I had a long time to think about these issues under his tutelage. I learnt a lot. At the time I sort of resented it thinking, 'I come from multicultural paradise; I do not need to know any of this', but it turns out that it is useful to know because some of what is going on in the Northern Territory now makes me worry about how durable our multicultural polity really is.

He offered me a cautionary note at the time about fighting for multiculturalism, and I offer that to the House now as well. The UK, which is every bit as diverse as here, does not have nearly the same unified front when it comes to multiculturalism. Bear in mind that Prime Minister David Cameron declared in 2011 that state multiculturalism was a failure in the UK. I never want to see that happen in the Northern Territory. I think it is important that we fight for multiculturalism and remember how much value it gives us. I will wrap up on that point.

I am excited that Stuart Park Primary School has extended its multicultural celebrations, and on Friday I will be at its Harmony Day Assembly Spectacular. Long live our commitment to multiculturalism in Australia.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Fong Lim for that speech on multiculturalism; it was quite enjoyable.

First I will quickly put on the record that while the Member for Johnston was reading the open letter from 170 frontline workers, some of whom were here, there was a fair amount of scoffing and sniggering from some members on the other side. Here is a tip for free: it is not a good look to ridicule or dismiss frontline workers when they happen to disagree with your government. I just wanted to put that on *Hansard*. It was witnessed by a few of us.

Now I will give a happy, fluffy adjournment speech on the latest happenings in my wonderful electorate of Nightcliff.

The iconic local festival Seabreeze is back from 9 to 11 May. The best foreshore in town will be blessed with three fantastic days and nights of music, art, food and culture. This festival is entirely reliant on donations and sponsorships, and I am proud to announce that I am sponsoring the festival with a \$5,000 donation.

Members: Hear, hear!

K McNAMARA: It is from the electorate allowance, not my personal bank account; let us be honest.

The Seabreeze Festival is incredibly important for our young and emerging artists, as they get a chance to play alongside some of Darwin's more established and well-loved acts.

I will also be judging the sandcastle competition which is a big responsibility, and I look forward to it.

Nightcliff Primary School had its pottery art showcase on Tuesday afternoon and today. I was sad to miss it due to Assembly sittings, but I am glad to support Nightcliff Primary School in its fundraisers. Well done to all the young artists. A special shout-out to my eldest, who has a pottery mug in the show. I am sorry I could not be there, but I am excited to see what you made when I get home.

Last Friday I had the immense honour of being the guest speaker at the Mary Moylan Social Worker of the Year Award. Many of our frontline workers are social workers. This award honours the memory of Mary Moylan, a dedicated and inspiring NT social worker. Congratulations to the winner, Dr Christine Fejo-King, and to all the nominees. It was incredibly well deserved. It was an evening of networking and celebration that acknowledged all nominees and the dedication and inspiring contributions of social workers to the Northern Territory.

I am grateful for all the incredible work that social workers do across the NT. In my electorate I have been heartened to see the work of Mission Australia's team. Their work in Litchfield Court has demonstrated the critical role of social work in fostering resilience and empowering communities whilst also ensuring social equity in the face of structural and immediate challenges. A big shout-out to the Mission Australia group mob and all the other social workers in the Nightcliff electorate.

As I reflect on the work of social workers I keep coming back to the idea of this social safety net we have. When I think about a net I think of all the woven threads held together at each intersection by a knot. Someone told me this analogy was a bit cringe, but I will go with it anyway. These knots I see as the social workers; they hold everything together. They connect the strands and they connect people to the fundamentals—safe housing, protection from domestic violence, education, nourishing food and finding purpose in people's lives. Thank you, social workers, for being the knots that hold the whole net together.

Over the weekend I had the chance to attend a citizenship ceremony as a guest of the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory. It was exciting, as it was the first time I had been to something like this. It was a beautiful time of celebration and reminded me that the diversity of our nation and communities is one of our utmost strengths.

At the ceremony I bumped into some of my old neighbours who used to live in Nightcliff. Unfortunately, Palmerston has them now, so it was a loss to Nightcliff. Amit and Mona are from India. On the weekend Amit, Mona and their seven-year-old received their Australian citizenship. Congratulations to Amit, Mona and Kriv and everyone else at the ceremony.