

National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia launch

Hawke, Bob, in Highlights of the Launch - National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia. Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989, pp 15-19.

Excerpts from the Prime Minister's speech at the launch 26 July 1989.

Fellow Australians...

Here today are:

- Australians whose people inhabited this continent 2,000 generations ago;
- Australians whose forebears arrived here two centuries ago;
- Australians whose grandparents and great grandparents came here before the last war;
- Australians whose parents sought a new life here after the war;
- Australians who joined us from overseas in very recent years;
- And the children of those newcomers who were born here among us.

In all this diversity that I see here before me, one unifying theme is clear.

And that is for all the differences in our places, our styles of clothes, our languages, our creeds, our colours, our races, there is one fundamental characteristic, one utterly vital value that we all share.

That is our commitment to Australia...

And it is our shared commitment to the institutions and values of a democratic Australia

and to the freedom of the individual within the rule of the law, our shared determination to build a great future for our grandchildren in this nation, that makes it so fitting that today we do use those words, 'Fellow Australians'...

First, it follows that all Australians are equally entitled to enjoy the rights and carry the responsibilities of life in this nation. We are all equally entitled to a fair go, equally entitled to dignity and self-respect, entitled to equal access to the services of government...

The second point that follows is that, within our shared commitment to this nation, we must never be ashamed of our diversity.

We should recognise the diversity for what it is - a great source of new talents and ideas, a catalyst for social dynamism, a true source of wealth in both its cultural and economic senses.

Some people see diversity as a threat to our social cohesion. Some indeed would seek to use diversity as a means of setting Australian against Australian, and of denying some Australians a fair go simply on the basis of the colour of their skin or their country of their birth.

Let it be repeated and understood at the outset; for this Government, for this Prime Minister, such views are simply unacceptable.

Because it is not diversity that creates weakness or discord. It is prejudice and intolerance that sow the seeds of divisiveness.

And under this Government, the days of sanctioned prejudice and official discrimination are over.

The days of the White Australia policy are behind us, and they are unequivocally behind us...

I believe it is a tragic loss that at the Federal level there has been some loss of bipartisanship on this issue...

It remains a great source of sadness to me that the Federal Opposition is still unwilling to commit itself openly, honestly and unashamedly to a multicultural Australia, with multicultural policies.

The fact is that today's Australia is a multicultural society. That is a demographic fact. It requires a positive policy response from all sides of politics, all levels of government...

What is important in the debate about multiculturalism today is how we manage our cultural diversity - how we ensure that the next generation of Australians will inherit an Australia that is confident in its individuality, enriched by its diversity and proud of its accomplishments...

The Agenda that we launched today...comprises three elements.

First it clearly defines the policy of multiculturalism and articulates the long-term goals and objectives that underpin that policy.

Second it sets in train a series of enduring structural and institutional changes.

And third, it includes a significant package of program initiatives involving immediate commitments of some \$50 million over three years and more than \$70 million in total.

Multiculturalism of course is only partly about enjoying and enhancing our diverse cultural heritage. It is also about social justice - about ensuring equality of treatment and of opportunity for all Australians. And it is about economic efficiency - about harnessing the skills and talents of all Australians.

So it follows that this Agenda, not least its spending initiatives, represent an investment from which all Australians, whatever their background, stand to benefit.

One of the principal achievements of the Agenda is that it begins to remedy a grievous injustice that has been done to many of the people who have come to Australia as migrants...