

Speech notes for
Hon Grace Portolesi MP
Minister for Multicultural Affairs

**Keynote Address to the
'Migration Update Conference'**

Don Dunstan Foundation

Friday 24 June 2011

4:30pm – 5:00pm

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Mr Bill Cossey AM, Chair of Management, Don Dunstan Foundation
- Hon John von Doussa QC, former Chancellor of the University of Adelaide and former President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- I begin by acknowledging that we meet on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship to their country.
- Thank you for your welcome.
- You have invited me here today to talk about my vision for migrants and refugees.
- It is timely to be asking this question because issues around the arrival of migrants and refugees continue to be controversially debated in many circles.
- I would like to be very clear: My vision that our community as a whole appreciates the incredible value of refugees and migrants and acknowledges their contribution.
- Because I have to say, that I don't believe we are at that point yet.
- It is ironic that while we are envied around the world for our predominantly harmonious society, our cultural and linguistic diversity and our successful multicultural policies, we recently had 9 straight days of letters to the editor published in the Advertiser criticising multiculturalism.
- In addition, the results of a 12 year study conducted by the University of Western Sydney published earlier this year further demonstrate that we have a long way to go before my vision becomes reality.
- The study clearly shows that racism not only exists in our society, but that it is a very complex issue.

- While the majority of respondents – 86.8 % think it’s a good thing for society to be made up of different cultures, around 41 % of respondents also find that Australia is weakened by people of different ethnic origin “sticking to their old ways”.
- Over 40 % feel that certain ethnic groups “do not fit into Australian society” and 41% have a narrow view of who belongs in Australia.
- And about one-in-ten Australians have very problematic views on diversity and on ethnic difference. They believe that some races are naturally inferior or superior, and they believe in the need to keep groups separated.
- And these attitudes persist despite the facts telling us overwhelmingly that refugees and migrants are valuable contributors to our society.
- They tell us that migrants and refugees contribute to our State socially, culturally and economically in so many ways.
- We are a better society thanks to our diversity.
- It provides us with the opportunity to grow as global citizens, to learn about our lives beyond our own backyards.
- And our diversity creates a bridge that links Australia with the rest of the world.
- According to last year’s Refugee Council of Australia Report, the economic benefits include opening up new markets, bringing in new skills, creating employment, and filling vacant employment niches in both rural and metropolitan areas.
- In addition, a large proportion of refugees and migrants are young. This translates into a positive net contribution to the labour market.

- Other research undertaken last year by Econtech for the Federal Government quantifies some of the benefits that flow to South Australia, in particular.
- The research forecast that – over a 20-year period – the humanitarian program would boost employment, Gross State Product and labour-force participation.
- And that the humanitarian program would also have a positive impact in specific areas such as construction, culture and recreation services, manufacturing and mining.
- Such facts should speak for themselves, and yet we still clearly have a problem.
- So what should we be doing?
- Firstly, we need to band together and once again find the courage to speak openly and loudly about the value of refugees and migrants.
- Because only in this way can the message be transmitted.
- Initiatives such as this conference are incredibly important.
- Your research and academic networking will add to our understanding of the value of having a culturally diverse society.
- This conference is a great initiative also because, for the first time, we have a forum where experts from all three of our Universities have come together to share the latest information, research and knowledge on migration.
- This is a first for our State and, I understand, the country, and for this, the Don Dunstan Foundation, and indeed you all, are to be congratulated.

- Our State, indeed, has a long and proud history of firsts especially in the area of diversity and equal opportunities.
- The first non-English newspaper in Australia (a German paper) was published in Adelaide in 1848.
- In 1895 we became the first Australian Colony to grant women the vote and allow women to stand for Parliament.
- And in 1965, South Australia was the first State to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race.
- I want us to continue to be a State of “firsts”.
- It is this courage and attitude of cooperation and solidarity that we now need.
- If you think back, the seventies and eighties were a period of extremely high activity around multiculturalism and migration.
- This is something that I clearly remember from my childhood.
- In fact, I personally witnessed how things changed thanks to that activity.
- There was an almost unstoppable momentum in society for greater inclusion, acceptance and acknowledgement of the benefits of our cultural diversity.
- This period was characterised by a common and concerted effort from the majority to act under the guidance, leadership and pioneering multicultural vision of the likes of Don Dunstan, Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser, and, in South Australia, the great policies introduced by names such as Chris Sumner and Lynn Arnold.

- I believe we must recapture that momentum and work together to promote the enormous contribution of our migrants and refugees.
- **Our second objective** should be to establish the best possible conditions for our migrants and refugees to feel welcomed and accepted in order for them to reach their full potential.
- This includes providing effective settlement services so that migrants and refugees can begin fully participating in their new life as quickly as possible.
- While the State Government does not determine how many migrants and refugees enter Australia, we do play a vital role in their settlement.
- The South Australian Government is working closely with communities and service providers to establish a better coordinated and efficient settlement service.
- We have undertaken thorough consultation and have identified gaps and needs in services.
- And a two-day conference earlier this year resulted in a targeted action plan devised by all parties on how to best address these gaps.
- We must also continue to fight actively and vocally against racism.
- Racism denies a person's or a people's right to exist, it denies fair treatment and it simply has no place in our society.
- And yet, as we have already seen, it persists.
- It never ceases to amaze me that people can have such short memories.
- Racism is still a reality for the majority of Aboriginal Australians.

- And of all the ethnic groups, it appears that currently Muslims are the focus of the majority of racist attacks.
- It is no more acceptable today than it was in the past when racism was targeted at others, such as Italians.
- Cav. Prof. Desmond O'Connor, in his 2004 book "Memories and Identities", reminds us of some of the treatment of Italians. He wrote:
 - *Since the most numerous non-British arrivals were the Italians, they were the group most often targeted for criticism. The following is an example of letters published in the Adelaide Advertiser:*
 - *[...] While I do not say that all Italians are unfit to become good Australian citizens, we are up against the fact that quite 80 p.c. of them are illiterate, and therefore, unable to use their brains as educated people in assisting to make Australia a country to be proud of with people of British and the best of European stock, such as Scandinavian, Swiss and French. [...]*
- Well, I guess I am living proof that such notions are as ridiculous as they sound.
- Despite what people may say, racism is most definitely not a question of freedom of speech or the exaggerated use of political correctness.
- There is simply no such thing as the freedom to vilify.
- Racism is most likely to occur where individuals have not fully understood the benefits of multiculturalism.
- And this, again, is an area of responsibility for us all.

- Each and every one of us is responsible for promoting the principles that underpin multiculturalism – respect, equity and a fair go for all.
- Our particular brand of multiculturalism is unique.
- It is based on an active policy that celebrates and encourages diversity and an adherence to Australian law in equal measures.
- And it has been successful.
- It has resulted in an above average uptake of Australian citizenship – more than 90 per cent among most communities.
- This is a clear indication of the commitment on the part of new arrivals to this nation.
- I am not fazed when other nations' leaders state that “multiculturalism is dead” as the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, recently did.
- We must remember that what they are referring to are their unsuccessful (or non-existent) policies rather than ours.
- Some people have said we live in a lucky country, but our community harmony is not about luck.
- It is about the way we have worked together to create the right environment for diversity to exist and multiculturalism to thrive.
- It is about our willingness and courage to not shy away from combating things like racism while fighting for the rights of all South Australians.
- That must be our template for the future.

- Ladies and gentlemen, I have given you my vision of the future of migrants and refugees in South Australia:
- They must be valued for the integral part they play in making South Australia great and we must do everything we can to ensure that they are.
- I look forward to continuing to work with you all to make this vision a reality.
- Before I finish, I would like to commend the Don Dunstan Foundation for organising this important conference. And I sincerely hope it will be the first of a long-lasting tradition.
- I would also like to acknowledge the great contributions made to this cause by two of the people intimately involved with this Conference: the Hon. Lynn Arnold and Professor Graeme Hugo, thank you to you both.
- And I would like to congratulate you all for bringing my vision one step closer to reality.
- Thank you.