



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCH OF "YEAR OF CITIZENSHIP"
SYDNEY - 30 SEPTEMBER 1988**

Exactly four decades ago today, on 30 September 1948, the Australian Parliament began to debate the Nationality and Citizenship Bill - the legislation which established for the first time the principle of Australian citizenship.

I am proud that it was a Minister in a Labor Government - the great Chifley Labor Government - who initiated that debate. Arthur Calwell, the then Minister for Immigration delivered the second reading speech in Parliament on this day in 1948.

But I do not refer to Calwell in any partisan sense.

Because I believe we can all be proud of the decision taken on that occasion to debate and legislate for the then novel concept of Australian citizenship.

In the wake of the sacrifices made by Australians in the Second World War, and at a time when Australia had taken the historic decision to welcome an unprecedented influx of immigrants to our nation, it was a visionary and deeply appropriate act to create Australian citizenship.

Today, 40 years later, we mark this important anniversary, in three important and, again, deeply appropriate, ways.

First, we welcome at this 1988 citizenship ceremony 88 people who have decided to declare publicly their commitment to this country by taking out Australian citizenship.

Second, we celebrate the fact that, in the 40 years since Australian citizenship was created, two million people have chosen to become citizens. The two millionth person is expected to take out citizenship somewhere in Australia during these weeks.

Third, I want to take this opportunity today to build upon the progress of the last 40 years by launching a new initiative in regard to Australia's citizenship: the Year of Citizenship.

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Over the next twelve months of the Year of Citizenship, we will be seeking to raise the level of understanding in the community of the true meaning of Australian citizenship. In particular we will be encouraging those Australian residents who have not done so to take out Australian citizenship and to join us as fellow-citizens of this great nation.

So at several levels this is truly an important day for all Australians.

But let me address myself principally to these 88 people who are here to take up Australian citizenship.

As a group, you represent a tremendous diversity of backgrounds and nationalities, of ages, occupations and cultures.

You come in fact from some 40 different countries and for the record let me list them all: Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Ecuador, Egypt, Fiji, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Israel, Ireland, Jordan, Korea, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Tonga, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vanuatu, Vietnam and Yugoslavia.

With a list like that, who needs an atlas! It is clear that you represent, in your diversity, the diversity of the whole world.

But for all that diversity as a group you have as individuals all come to choose Australia as your new home and you have all arrived at the same decision today: you have all decided to take on the same rights and responsibilities as citizens of Australia.

In doing so you remind us of the all-important truth of the Australian story: that we are and essentially remain a nation of immigrants.

We are drawn from 130 nations as well as from the ancient culture of the Aboriginal and Islander people who cared for this land for more than 40,000 years.

And in taking out citizenship today you also remind us of the counterpart to that historical fact: that Australians of all backgrounds have, through commitment and hard effort, worked side by side to build a peaceful and prosperous nation.

I do not seek to pretend that newcomers have in every case been instantly or easily welcomed in Australia. Prejudice and discrimination have, unfortunately, been features of Australia's history.

But I do assert that what unites us all as Australians is far greater than what may seem to divide us.

We share a common land, a common loyalty and a common aspiration to raise our children in peace and wellbeing. In other words we share a commitment to Australia.

It is that commitment, and that commitment alone, which determines whether you are an Australian or not - not your language, not your religion, not your style of dress or country of origin.

As people have been proving for two centuries in this land, it is commitment to Australia that counts.

Today you are demonstrating that commitment in the most profound and important way - by becoming Australian citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The decisions to migrate to Australia and to take up Australian citizenship are among the greatest decisions one could take in a lifetime.

Forty years ago, the Nationality and Citizenship Act gave Australians a means of expressing their commitment to their country and their pride in their identity as Australian citizens.

The Act was passed by both Houses of Parliament and became law on Australia Day 1949.

One of the provisions of the Act was to institute a solemn, impressive and memorable ceremony at which citizenship could be conferred. That is what we are here for today.

Before the Act, Australian citizenship as a separate national identity had not existed. Some people did not believe it should come into existence. They believed the new Bill would impair Australia's allegiance to our British motherland - a view that is not to be dismissed as ignorant or frivolous but rather must be understood as very much a product of the time.

Britain is, of course, the source of our system of parliamentary democracy, our legal system, many of our traditions and our language. There will always be a special relationship between Britain and Australia and we should always be proud of that heritage.

But Australians recognised in 1948 with the creation of Australian citizenship, and they have recognised with increasing force ever since, that we have a new and more independent role to play in the world. Our strategic ties, our trade relations, the composition of our people - all have changed dramatically in the last forty years.

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Although the Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance which you have just taken required you to declare your allegiance to the Queen, it is not the Queen of the United Kingdom but the Queen of Australia, our own Head of State.

And although the United Kingdom remains the single major source of immigrants to Australia, we are today a proudly multicultural nation.

Because as a result of immigration Australia is a richer, more exciting, more diverse, more prosperous society, a society made up of people from many lands united into a distinctive Australian identity.

Some participants in the so-called immigration debate today imply that we can turn back the clock in some way and undo the past 200 years.

But we cannot repudiate the multicultural nature of Australian society because to do so would be to repudiate our very identity as Australians.

And we must never again embrace discrimination on grounds of race as a principle of our immigration policy because to do so would be both morally repugnant and economically insane.

The White Australia policy is dead and it is buried. It must have no place in Australia's future.

Under this Prime Minister and under this Government, I can assure you there will be no return to discrimination and no erosion of our commitment to multiculturalism.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In the four decades since Australian citizenship was created, some two million people have taken the decision being taken today.

It is appropriate that we celebrate the attainment of the two million mark in some special way - even though it is impossible to identify who precisely will be our two millionth citizen.

Accordingly, two people in this group of 88 have been chosen as representatives of the two million people who have gone before you in swearing their oath or making their affirmation of allegiance to their new home, Australia.

These two people symbolise all those who have become Australians in the past - and the thousands and millions who will follow them in the future.

One of them is a young man born in Edinburgh - typical of the millions who have come to Australia over the last two centuries from the United Kingdom. The other is a young woman born in Saigon - typical of those who have come more recently to find a new home in Australia.

Nigel Stoker is 33. He arrived in Australia four years ago and is taking up citizenship today with his wife, who is French.

Ngoc Anh Nguyen is 19. She arrived in Australia in 1982 as a 12 year old who spoke no English and who had spent five months in a refugee camp.

Together, these two young people represent our future: for it is the young people who have the responsibility of ensuring Australia remains the tolerant and prosperous society it is today.

It is appropriate, too, that Ms Nguyen, as a woman, reminds us that the Nationality and Citizenship Act for the first time gave women, whether married or single, an equal right with men to hold Australia citizenship.

Just as we are proud to celebrate our two millionth citizen, we should be equally concerned that a very large number of Australian residents who are qualified to become citizens have not done so.

Indeed it is estimated that there are one million people eligible to become citizens who live here as non-citizens.

It is to encourage those people to follow your example, and to remind all Australians of the value and importance of citizenship that I have pleasure in launching the Year of Citizenship.

Over the next twelve months we will be making special efforts to encourage - not require, but encourage - as many eligible people as possible to take up citizenship.

Substantial financial and administrative resources will be devoted to the campaign over the coming year.

I want to see a lot of ceremonies such as this conducted throughout Australia. I will be participating in some of them myself and I trust other Members of Parliament, along with our local and state government counterparts, will also make a special effort to become involved.

Those of us who are Australian citizens by birth rarely have occasion to make a public affirmation of our commitment to our country. We are never required, as new citizens are, to take the oath or affirmation of allegiance - to declare our allegiance, and to promise to observe the laws of Australia and to fulfil the duties of an Australian citizen.

Yet all of us have a duty to ensure that Australia remains a peaceful, prosperous, decent and just nation.

We all share a responsibility to Australia and the declaration of these 88 people today reminds us of that duty.

Because as Arthur Calwell said 40 years ago, Australian citizenship symbolised not only our pride in Australia but also our willingness to offer a share in our future to the new Australian citizens among us.

These new citizens, he said:

"will be able to say, as proudly as any of us, 'I am an Australian'. Perhaps those words will mean even more to those who remember life in less fortunate lands than to us who enjoy the freedom of plenty, the sunshine and social equality, of this great democracy.

"This vast and virile country which we are privileged to hold, and for the development of which we are responsible, can be made as great and noble a land as we, with our collective brains, muscles, and devotion to high ideals, wish it to be."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Prime Minister of Australia, I welcome you as my fellow citizens and I wish you well in all you do in the future.

Many different paths have brought you here to this point in your lives. From here let us work together as fellow Australians, combining our brains, our muscles and our idealism to building the great nation of Australia in prosperity, peace and freedom - to make it into the future what it surely is today, simply the greatest nation on earth.
