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**PRIME MINISTER**

**FOR MEDIA**

**16 MARCH 1990**

I have today sent the attached letter to Mr Carl Harbaum MBE, Chairperson of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia Inc.

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PRIME MINISTER

CANBERRA

16 MAR 1990

Mr Carl Harbaum MBE  
Chairperson  
Federation of Ethnic Communities'  
Councils of Australia Inc.  
5th Floor  
541 George Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Carl

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) recently issued a news release indicating the priority issues for 1990 and seeking the views of political parties.

Outlined below are the policies of the Australian Labor Party on each of those issues.

I should be grateful if you could bring this response to the attention of your members, and advise them accordingly.

Issue 1. Preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism i.e. equitable participation, fair go, fair share, fair say for Australians from ethnic backgrounds.

As I indicated forcefully when I launched the Labor Government's policy on Immigration, Ethnic Affairs and Multiculturalism on Thursday, my Government is totally committed to the importance of multicultural policies to manage our ethnic diversity in the best interest of all Australians. It is for this reason that I launched last year a National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia with concrete initiatives funded at \$89m. My Government believes in ensuring that migrants are able to participate equitably in our society as soon as possible and for that reason is totally opposed to Coalition plans to extend the length of residence required for citizenship from two to four years.

**ISSUE 2.** Ensuring all publicly funded services respect and recognise Australia's culturally diverse population and their organisations as integral parts of Australian community services.

My Government is proud that in 1986 it implemented an Access and Equity strategy to ensure that all Australians gain equal access to culturally-appropriate services. Nearly all Government departments have now produced their first Access and Equity plans and will be obliged to report on their initiatives in their Annual Reports. Some \$2.9m over three years has been set aside for initiatives in the areas of community services and health, local government and consumer education. Grants have been provided to ethnic community organisations, including FECCA, to help ensure that Government services and programs recognise Australia's culturally diverse population.

**ISSUE 3.** Giving equality of opportunity and protection from all forms of discrimination to Australian women of non-English speaking background.

Australian women of non-English speaking background often face a double disadvantage in gaining equality of opportunity. It is for that reason that my Government established the Non-English Speaking Background Women's Council in August 1989 and has recently increased its annual budget by 25% to allow greater involvement by community organisations.

**ISSUE 4.** Ensuring that Australians of non-English speaking background have a more equitable share in training and retraining opportunities.

In one of the Government's major decisions in the multicultural area, we recently established at a cost of \$7 million over three years, the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) to ease the accreditation of overseas experience and skills for migrants. This year NOOSR expects to spend \$2.2m on bridging courses for 500 overseas-trained professionals. It has also ensured that training opportunities have been equally available to non-English speaking background Australians and that English language training has been provided as part of the necessary retraining of our workforce.

**Issue 5.** Recognise, support and integrate the self-help efforts of ethnic communities to provide for the specific needs of their members, particularly the elderly.

My Government is fully committed to ensuring that the elderly of ethnic communities are able to live in dignity. In 1986 a four year \$40 million package was earmarked for residential care for ethnic older people and this level of support has since been increased to \$65 million.

**Issue 6.** The further development of the National Policy on Languages - with a clear priority on English for all, community languages, wider availability of language services.

I am extremely proud of the fact that I introduced Australia's first National Policy on Languages in 1987. In my next term that policy will be further developed. In particular the Fourth Hawke Government will continue to support a balanced program of second language teaching including community languages. It will also establish a National Bureau of Language Services to provide better interpreter and language services across the nation.

**Issue 7.** Giving the Special Broadcasting service its own legislative base and charter adequate public funding; to oppose commercialisation; to extend viewing areas.

My Government will provide the SBS with its own legislative base and charter committing it to multicultural and multi-lingual broadcasting. At a capital cost of \$25 million SBS TV will be progressively extended to the La Trobe Valley, Bendigo, Ballarat, Darling Downs, Darwin, Spencer Gulf, North-east Tasmania, Cairns and Townsville. A new three-year initiative will, through the Public Broadcasting Foundation, provide an extra \$1.4 million funding annually to SBS radio and public broadcasting stations to establish a networked ethnic news and current affairs service to serve ethnic communities both in the cities and rural areas.

**Issue 8.** Maintaining the Office of Multicultural Affairs to advise the Prime Minister directly and be responsible to him.

The Hawke Labor Government set up the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) in 1987. The Office has justified its creation in the most comprehensive and convincing way and will remain in my Department and report directly to me.

**Issue 9.** Ensuring the continued existence of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission - in particular its services to non-English speaking background Australians in the area of Human and Legal Rights.

We are opposed to Coalition plans to abolish the Commission. Under Labor the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission will be maintained as an independent statutory body. It has played an important role for non-English speaking background Australians. Its National Enquiry into Racist Violence will underpin the Government's commitment of \$5.7 million for improved community relations - to which, unfortunately, the Coalition has expressed opposition.

**Issue 10.** Ensuring the continued existence of the Australia Council and its programs for non-English speaking background Australian artworkers and artists.

My Government will continue to support the Australia Council and in particular its efforts to ensure equal access for artists from non-English speaking background grants. The Council has this year received a 6 per cent increase in funding for its Arts for a Multicultural Australia Program. It is deeply regrettable that the Opposition proposes to abolish the Australia Council.

**Issue 11.** Tidying up the regulations of the Immigration Act to ensure the rights of Australian citizens and residents are not infringed.

My Government is committed to the overhaul of the outdated Immigration Act and to the introduction of new regulations designed to improve the fairness, consistency and openness of the operation of migration policy. To the extent that there remain unintended consequences to the new regulations they will be changed. Some 200,000 has recently been set aside to establish a free advice service on the new regulations at Migrant Resource Centres in our capital cities.

**Issue 12.** Supporting a vigorous immigration program which is non-discriminatory in terms of race and creed, and which gives clear and sensitive priority to family reunion and humanitarian grounds.

I am totally committed, no matter what the political cost, to maintaining a non-discriminatory immigration program. My Government will continue to ensure that family reunion and refugee migration comprise the largest portion of the intake. We are opposed to Coalition plans to reduce the proportion of family migrants.

**Issue 13. Ensuring that the expenditure savings of \$20 million forecast by the Coalition Parties' Economic Action Plan must not disadvantage applicants under the Family Reunion Program or special humanitarian programs.**

My Government is totally opposed to slashing \$20 million that might otherwise be spent on settlement services. It is equally appalled at the Coalition's proposal to prevent migrants having access to social security and invalidity pensions and unemployment benefits in their first year in Australia.

Let me say in conclusion that I look forward to working with FECCA, and other key ethnic organisations in my fourth term as Prime Minister.

Together we can build a fair, just and tolerant Australia for our children and grandchildren.

Yours sincerely



R J L Hawke