



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
OPENING OF NEW FECCA HEADQUARTERS
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In a recent UNESCO address, the distinguished French sociologist, Alain Touraine, said the most important task facing the world was "to learn how to live together" - and that, above all, this means we need to learn how to "manage diversity".

I don't think anyone would argue with this. It is a challenge to the international community in the post Cold War world, and it is a challenge to our own communities.

We are entitled to say I think that we have done better than most others in this regard.

The creation here of a rich multicultural society built on traditions of tolerance, freedom and fairness is one of Australia's great contemporary achievements.

So much so, I'm not sure I am altogether comfortable with the expression "managing diversity".

To me, it sounds too technocratic for our purposes.

It may have been appropriate a decade ago when Australia was coming to grips with the principles and practice of what we know today as multiculturalism.

I don't think most Australians any longer view our diversity as something that must be managed.

We don't think of it as a problem.

We think of it, increasingly, as one of our greatest assets.

The multitude of different ethnic communities is one of our strengths - not just in the realms of culture and the arts, but in commerce.

I think what should really be exercising us is the task of tapping into the resources of creativity and energy which multicultural Australia can deliver.

We are a country with links to more than 150 different cultures, religions and traditions; twenty per cent of Australians were born outside Australia, and these people added to their children constitute almost half of the Australian population.

In economic terms, therein lies great potential.

In recent years we have come to acknowledge this. We call it "productive diversity".

By this we mean that we recognise there are advantages inherent in the understanding so many Australians have of the culture, languages and business practices of many of our trading partners.

As we pointed out earlier this year in *Working Nation: the White Paper on Employment and Growth*, this knowledge is now an integral part of the Government's industry, trade and investment strategies.

Astute business people have moved quickly on this resource.

For example, the law firm, Phillips Fox, has used one of its Vietnamese-born lawyers to help establish a presence in Hanoi and win contracts to translate Vietnamese foreign investment laws into English.

The food exporter, Tixana, uses the business networks and market knowledge of its Asian-born management and staff to tailor its snack foods for export to South East Asia.

And there are, of course, many more examples like these.

The encouragement of real cultural pluralism has made our national life more complex and dynamic. It has contributed a great deal to the artistic and intellectual life of the nation.

I couldn't help noticing with some pleasure the other day what the great Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, had to say about Australia after his recent visit. He said he saw it becoming a "cultural magnet" for the world.

He said - without "a trace of humour", according to the reporter - that Australia might become the centre of a "new humanism".

"I got this notion", he said, "that with the sun and population and good management it could be the Tuscany of the 21st century".

I think it's very significant that he counted the population as one of the key elements.

It was not with Tuscany in mind that we delivered the cultural policy statement, *Creative Nation*, a fortnight ago.

But we did have in mind pulling together as many of the creative threads in Australia as we could.

We had in mind encouraging the cultural ferment and giving a creative, humanist ethic the chance to thrive.

We recognise the profound and fundamental contribution that our cultural diversity will make in this process.

Creative Nation strengthens the inclusive basis of cultural policy in Australia.

We want to - and must - draw all those cultures into the mainstream; we must draw upon them for strength at home and for our image abroad.

As we approach the 21st century, we should be projecting Australia as what it increasingly is - tolerant and pluralist, innovative and creative, rich and diverse.

For this our cultural agencies will need the capacity to develop high quality products and expertise which reflect the emerging reality of Australian life and Australian identity.

That is why we allocated an additional \$13 million to SBS Television to produce documentaries and drama.

I expect that the funding will enable SBS to produce quality programs whose principal market is Australia, but which will also appeal to people in the countries of Europe and Asia.

This sort of initiative seems to me an essential means of encouraging that trend in Australia towards the development of a highly contemporary identity.

I have remarked on this several times before, and others are also making the observation - that our identity is being significantly shaped **now**, that it is what we do **today** which defines us.

As the Reverend David Gill of the World Council of Churches told the Centenary of Federation Advisory Committee:

"Our identity is not something inherited for good or ill, like it or not, from years gone by. It is something we are creating. It is one of the very special aspects of being part of contemporary Australia."

The Centenary of Federation Committee found "a clear consensus": there is now a genuine desire to belong to a united, cohesive nation, and yet also a real sense that tolerance, respect for difference, reconciliation and the old Australian principle of a "fair go" are defining elements of contemporary Australia.

If it is true to say that these are the values we share and which, broadly speaking, constitute our identity, it follows that we should want to see them reflected in our concept of citizenship and in what we teach our children.

The Centenary of Federation Committee found "a chorus of voices urging a shared political culture in which people were agreed about the responsibilities of citizenship as well as the rights of citizenship".

It is for these kinds of reasons that we established the Civics Expert Group, under the chairmanship of Professor Stuart McIntyre, to provide the Government with a plan for public education and information on Australian government, citizenship and the constitution.

The Group will be delivering its report on 30 November.

Among other things, multiculturalism is a significant advance on the concept of social democracy - and I think modern Australia conclusively demonstrates that it is a concept with practical advantages .

I have outlined how it gives us economic advantages abroad, particularly as the global economy emerges.

Globalisation is more than an economic phenomenon.

To the extent that we are celebrating and redefining our nationhood in this decade, we are doing it at a time when national and cultural lines are being blurred in the global community.

To me - and I think to many others - that means we are uniquely positioned to shape an Australia which sits comfortably and works creatively in the new world environment of the 21st century.

In this context I might say it is, therefore, perfectly appropriate that next April Australia will host the first major international conference on global cultural diversity.

We must encourage the existing tendencies in multiculturalism.

And at the same time, we need to push on with the task of ensuring that all Australians understand the foundations on which our nationhood is built.

It is essential that we build into Australian democracy an appreciation of democracy.

That we build into multicultural Australia an appreciation of the tradition of tolerance on which it stands and depends.

That is why we are addressing the issue of citizenship: not just through the Civics Expert Group, but through the National Multicultural Advisory Council whose first meeting, under the Chairmanship of Mick Young, I attended last week.

The Council will play an important role in ensuring that community views inform the policy debate and help to frame the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia.

I hope the Council will address the issue of citizenship because ultimately it is through the symbols and reality of citizenship that cultural identities are included in our national life.

The concept of citizenship we have in mind is one that generates shared values and a common understanding of achievements and aspirations.

It is now 45 years since the Citizenship Act was passed.

As we head to the centenary of Federation, it is time to re-examine our citizenship legislation and look at how citizenship might enable all Australians to participate more fully in the life of the nation.

There is, as you know, a report of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration which examines this issue and the Government will respond in coming months.

But let me make take this opportunity to say, without prejudice to any of the principles of multiculturalism, the Government believes that whoever takes up residence in Australia should also make a commitment to Australia.

The first loyalty of all who have made Australia their home should be to Australia.

And it is not in anyway inconsistent with the principles of multiculturalism to expect people to take out citizenship.

Australian citizenship enshrines tolerance and diversity.

Of course, the values embodied in citizenship do not of themselves make good citizens.

Ultimately citizenship is a voluntary act, albeit one dependent on every group and individual recognising that freedom and tolerance come with obligations.

This, of course, is something which FECCA recognises.

They have made a great contribution to the success and development of multicultural Australia.

The point I would like to make today is that by doing this, they have made a great contribution to contemporary Australian nationhood and identity.

And the demand is there for FECCA to do much more.

You have been successful in dealing with many of the needs and aspirations of those who have migrated to this country.

FECCA has played a valuable role in the establishment of the Australian Multicultural Foundation; the National Language Policy; and the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition.

I am pleased that FECCA has deliberately sought to develop stronger links with national non-government organisations such as the ACTU, the Australian Consumers Federation, the Council on the Ageing and ACOSS.

But no organisation can afford to rest on its laurels and it is, therefore, entirely appropriate that FECCA consolidate its role as the umbrella body for ethnic communities' councils in Australia by establishing its national headquarters in the national capital.

It is also appropriate that FECCA's executive is moving away from total reliance on Commonwealth core funding, to one based on a mix of Commonwealth and other sources of funding for achieving specific outcomes.

In this regard, I am particularly pleased to see the sponsorships from organisations such as the Commonwealth Bank and Telecom. I hope others in the private sector will follow their lead.

I am also pleased to learn that FECCA is developing an agenda for reform.

It has established a constitutional committee to look at ways of broadening its constituent base; and its membership is currently contemplating expansion to encompass Regional Ethnic Community Councils.

We think that any initiative to broaden the representative base of FECCA is a good one.

As new migrant groups arrive in Australia, it is obviously essential for your organisation to establish links with these people.

Such reforms, together with those initiated by Senator Bolkus, could lead to FECCA becoming the peak umbrella body for all residents of Australia from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The Government would applaud this move and we would encourage you to achieve the goal sooner rather than later.

Today's opening of this new national headquarters in Canberra is, I believe, a major step forward for FECCA.

It marks a new stage in the Federation's history and I take great pleasure in declaring this building open.

Thank you.