

SPEECH BY
MR HIEU VAN LE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
CHAIR, SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL & ETHNIC AFFAIRS
COMMISSION
AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE ASSOCIATION LIVING IN HARMONY
INITIATIVE
COWANDILLA PRIMARY SCHOOL
THURSDAY 3 APRIL 2008

I would like to acknowledge this land that we meet on today is the traditional lands for Kurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

SPEECH

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today and to participate in the launch of this important initiative.

The aim of the program is to build on our past achievements by fostering greater dialogue about Australian values and the importance of cultural harmony within our multicultural community.

In South Australia this is particularly important as our State is now home to people from 200 different countries with more than 200 different languages – in addition to the many Aboriginal languages that are part of the State's living heritage.

Almost 600,000 South Australians – 40 percent of our population – were either born overseas or have one or both parents born overseas.

With such social diversity it is vital that we continue to live and work together, regardless of colour, religion or cultural background, to create the best opportunities for all South Australians.

The policy of multiculturalism helps us to do this by promoting cultural harmony and respect in our communities while ensuring everyone gets a 'fair go' and respecting the rule of law and our democratic principles.

These are all values that are not only central to multiculturalism, but are at the heart of what it is to be Australian.

Of course successful integration into the Australian community is helped enormously through learning to speak the English language.

And you might have noticed that I have a bit of an accent myself.

That is because some thirty years ago I fled the devastation of the Vietnam War with my wife to find a new home in Australia.

We arrived on board a leaky wooden boat one hot afternoon in 1977, and as we chugged slowly into Darwin Harbour, two sun-burnt Aussies in a tinnie sped past and yelled out to us: "G'day mate! Welcome to Australia."

Since that time I have come to appreciate the full significance of that uniquely Australian greeting, in a country that has given me every chance to succeed in my chosen profession and to contribute to our civic culture at the highest levels.

When I arrived in Adelaide I was fortunate to receive help, guidance, acceptance and understanding from caring people during the first weeks, months and years after my arrival.

What I quickly learnt from my reception in Darwin Harbour and from the help I was given in Adelaide was that perhaps the most important marker of Australian society is its generosity of spirit.

It is that generosity of spirit that will ensure the success of this project and, indeed, it is what makes multiculturalism successful in Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, the project that brings us all together today has the potential to make a significant contribution to building better communities in our State.

Not only will those who are a part of this program be exposed to new ideas and experiences, but we in the wider community can also benefit from your learning.

The knowledge and experience gained by students, their families and teachers alike can help to broaden our understanding and appreciation of our multicultural community.

I look forward to learning the outcomes of this program, and I wish those involved from the four participating schools all the best for the year ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.