

SPEECH BY MR HIEU VAN LE
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CHAIRMAN, SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL AND
ETHNIC AFFAIRS COMMISSION
TO THE GREEK AUSTRALASIAN HELLENIC EDUCATIONAL
PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION (AHEPA) ACADEMIC AWARDS
WEDNESDAY 4 JUNE 2008
CITY OF WEST TORRENS CIVIC CENTRE, HILTON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Hon Michael Atkinson M.P. , Minister for Multicultural Affairs
- Ms Vickie Chapman M.P., Deputy Leader of the Opposition
- Mr Dimitris Hatzopoulos, Consul General of Greece
- The Hon Greg Crafter
- The Hon Julian Stefani
- Mr John Trainer, Mayor of West Torrens
- Mr John Kiosoglous, MBE KSA AE SM, Chairman, Ethnic Schools Board
- Mr George Demetriou, President AHEPA Chapter, South Australia.
- Ladies and gentlemen

SPEECH

It gives me great pleasure to be here this evening at the presentation of the AHEPA Awards 2008.

In finding out more about AHEPA and tonight's awards I was impressed with what I learned about both. The aims and objectives of AHEPA and the promotion of these awards for actively encouraging language learning are issues that I also hold to be important in our society today.

Some of the major tenets of the AHEPA association ring close to my own heartfelt beliefs – you work diligently to make the world a better place for those who are less fortunate; you promote and encourage loyalty and patriotism to Australia; and you champion a sincere love for education and culture.

I am happy to say that today in South Australia we live in and enjoy a very harmonious multicultural society where respecting and valuing each other's cultures and traditions is an important and enriching aspect of our state.

And for that, all South Australians can be proud.

Language learning is a fundamental human experience, that sets us apart from other creatures – from the lullabies that every culture and civilisation has handed down to their children from generation to generation to the oral histories and folklore told to us by our older generations, that keep alive who we are, where we came from and where we can progress to.

2008 has been declared as International Year of Languages. The theme is “Language Matters”.

The first Greek language school in South Australia was established in Port Pirie soon after Greek migrants settled there about 100 years ago. For more than thirty years Modern Greek has been part of the South Australian public schools curriculum.

Today we have about 1500 students attending Greek language ethnic schools in South Australia as well as having Greek language being taught in primary and secondary schools.

In addition, Modern Greek studies are offered in South Australian universities.

There is great value in students learning a language in addition to English and last year the state government launched a renewed and revitalised vision for language learning in South Australia with the release of the *Languages Statement 2007–2011*, accompanied by the *Languages Engagement Strategy 2007–2008*.

The languages statement recognises that in an increasingly globalised society literacy means more than being proficient in English; students today need to be able to read, write and communicate in a range of different cultural contexts both within Australia and overseas.

A broadened understanding of literacy makes languages other than English less “foreign” and more critical to the educational development of all Australians.

Language is the vehicle into a culture and there is no better way of learning about a culture than by speaking the language. This is particularly important in our multicultural society, and I believe that we all need to maintain our languages and cultures for current and future generations, so that our cultural heritage, stories and traditions remain alive in our communities.

South Australians come from more than 200 different countries of birth and more than 200 languages are spoken in South Australian homes.

The world is changing, and although English is currently the language of the dominant geopolitical power structures, other languages have gained in importance, not to say sheer numbers of speakers, and they will make their presence strongly felt.

South Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity and international outlook is a major selling point in attracting skilled migrants to boost our population and meet areas of labour demand in a growing economy.

AHEPA has been working for many years to maintain and strengthen the learning of Greek in South Australia and the awards announced this evening will further reinforce these efforts.

I congratulate you all on your important contribution to both language education and multiculturalism in South Australia.

I commend the Australasian Hellenic Educational Progressive Association for providing this Award and for organising tonight's Award Ceremony for Academic Excellence in Modern Greek.

I also commend the teachers for their dedication and commitment to their students, and, I congratulate people who receive awards for their hard work and commitment.

Thank you