

SPEECH BY MR HIEU VAN LE
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FLINDERS UNIVERSITY RELIGIOUS CENTRE OPENING
WEDNESDAY 9 APRIL 2008
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Sir Eric Neale, Former Governor of South Australia and Chancellor, Flinders University and Lady Neale
- Dr Basil Hetzel, Former Lieutenant Governor of South Australia and Mrs Hetzel;
- Professor Michael Barber, Vice Chancellor, Flinders University and Mrs Barber;
- Uncle Lewis O'Brien, Kurna Elder
- Mr Geoff Boyce, Chairperson of the Religious Centre Committee
- Venerable Thich Truc Phap
- Mrs Judith Roberts - Deputy Chancellor
- Ms Anne Edwards Former Vice Chancellor
- Multi Faith Chaplains
- Ladies and gentlemen

SPEECH

Firstly, 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.

Thank you for inviting me here tonight to celebrate with you the renaming of the Religious centre, "Oasis: Faith Spirit Community".

I am happy to be here to share in this celebration of the university faith communities – it is an important step forward for the university.

I read in the Vision statement of the centre that one of the aims of the *Oasis* is to be “*a place to support, respect and learn from each other, in common and separate paths, a place where spirits are lifted and faith nurtured*”.

This environment of inclusiveness and recognition that all people are welcome, no matter what their beliefs, is at the heart of multiculturalism and of our society.

You may know that almost 600,000 South Australians – 40 percent of our population – were either born overseas or have one or both parents born overseas.

About half of these – more than three hundred thousand or 20 percent of all South Australians – were either born in a non-English speaking background country or have one or both parents born in a non-English speaking background country.

More than 170,000 South Australians speak a language other than English at home.

Last year over 20,000 overseas students came to South Australia, and I believe approximately 20% of Flinders University’s students are international students, studying here or overseas.

Multiculturalism describes the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia; as a policy, it manages the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of both the individual and the society as a whole.

We have amongst us the wisdom, experience and outlook of a great many peoples and cultures; the experience of the whole world has come to South Australia, and all these things combine to draw from each one of us the best that we have to offer.

Multiculturalism has given us the strongest foundations and the best building blocks to build a cohesive community and a strong nation.

Of all of the defining aspects of life that shape who an individual is and how they interact with others and the world around them, there are few things more important than their core beliefs.

Religion, spirituality and faith are core values of any individual, to be free to practise one's religion freely and without discrimination is the right of every individual.

South Australia has a strong and proud history of maintaining cohesive relations between communities despite pressures and conflicts in other parts of the world.

A multi faith perspective seeks to promote harmony, understanding and cooperation. It strengthens the institution and the foundations of multiculturalism in its own way, and shows how we can build a community of "diverse equals."

An ongoing, open dialogue between faiths can foster social harmony, compassion, and better understanding among communities, and we must nurture and advance this process.

An important foundation upon which nations are built is the cooperation and respect for one another, and valuing and acknowledging that each individual has the right to practice their own beliefs.

The university campus is a microcosm of society, with the rich diversity of cultures, language and faiths, and tonight we celebrate all that it means to be welcomed, accepted and valued for who you are.

A multicultural society is one where all citizens are respected for who they are no matter where they were born, what language they speak, what religion they follow or what cultural traditions they value or practise.

Multiculturalism is, of course, much more than the sharing and enjoyment of celebrations. It is about building a society that understands that the individuals who make it up, have their own histories and experiences, and that these shape the individuals and, ultimately, the society in which they live.

“Oasis: Faith Spirit Community” is and will continue to be a source of support and comfort to all those who need guidance and sustenance on their life’s journey.

By reinforcing the basic principles of respect and understanding for all, and by dispelling misconceptions about other cultures and religions, we can all work towards common goals.

I applaud and congratulate you for joining these initiatives and wish you all a positive and fulfilling future. *Oasis* will truly live up to its name as a place of rest, support and welcome to all.

I thank you for your contribution and dedication to multiculturalism and for inviting me to be a part of it.