



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

PREMIER'S MULTICULTURAL GALA

Saturday, 17 March 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Honourable Daniel Andrews MP, Premier of Victoria
and **Mrs Catherine Andrews**

The Honourable Robin Scott MP, Minister for Multicultural Affairs

The Honourable Bruce Atkinson MLC, President of the Legislative Council

Inga Peulich MLC, Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Ms Samantha Ratnam MLC, Leader of The Victorian Greens

Other Members of Parliament

Consuls-General

Ms Helen Kapalos, Chair, Victorian Multicultural Commission and Commissioners

Deputy Commissioner Andrew Crisp; representing **Chief Commissioner of Police Graham Ashton**

Community Leaders

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this evening.

Tony and I are delighted to be here with you all tonight, celebrating one of the greatest strengths our state can boast: its multicultural heritage.

As you know, almost half of us were born overseas, or have at least one parent born overseas.

In line with the theme of this year's cultural diversity week, I am personally, '*proud to belong*' to this large and lucky group.

My father was born overseas. He came to Australia when he was 15 years old.

It wasn't always easy for him, as a 'foreigner', as he was referred to then. And it wasn't always easy for us in the next generation, even though we were born in Australia.

I recall an incident in primary school that made me aware of that sense of '*foreignness*'.

In fact, I recall it very clearly.

My little red lunchbox contained rye bread and salami sandwiches. All the other kids had cheese or vegemite on white bread.

I was teased and made to feel different. I was made to feel that my life and my lunchbox were steeped in something 'foreign' so that I did not fully belong.

Today, of course, salami sandwiches are ubiquitous and no symbol of 'otherness'.

Such change across the decades lies at the heart of multicultural Australia. What once seemed foreign, is embraced as the norm. What once seemed unusual, becomes unremarkable.

Of course, the complexities and nuances of multiculturalism can never just be analysed in terms of the different cuisines that it brings.

Food is no more than a metaphor.

We can gauge waves of migration through it. We can understand cultures through it. And we can come together to enjoy it and its diversity.

Our lives in Victoria are – quite simply – all the better for every aspect of our diversity.

We are enriched by different perspectives. We are more interesting. We learn of the things that make our communities unique. We recognise the things that unite us.

Victoria is a place that resounds with the diverse experiences of people with different languages, different traditions and a broad range of beliefs.

The first Australians, whose history of at least 60,000 years is entwined with this land. Those whose ancestors came by boat as convicts or settlers. Those who came for a better life for themselves and their children, or have arrived seeking asylum, or those who have come to study at our universities.

We are better for them all.

But multiculturalism isn't always easy.

For me as a little girl, the bigotry was bewildering: manifested, as it was, in the shape of something as benign as my school lunchbox.

Of course, that experience was so very minor compared to the hardship and discrimination faced by many in this room, this evening, and beyond.

And so, this week as we celebrate our bounty of achievements towards making Victoria a respectful and harmonious community, we must also commit to making it even better. To remain vigilant. To ensure that all Victorians are embraced.

Even when it's hard. Even when we disagree with each other. Even when difference can frustrate, confound or even frighten us a little.

We need to do that because we care about our children, and our children's children. We care about our future and their future.

We all want – in the words of our state motto – *'peace and prosperity'* for ourselves and our families.

But we can never attain that peace and prosperity for ourselves, if we don't secure it for others.

We can never feel 'proud to belong' unless we each do whatever we can to ensure that all Victorians enjoy an equal sense of belonging.

It is a pleasure to be here this evening in a room full of people committed to that sense of belonging.