



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **ISLAMIC COUNCIL OF VICTORIA ANNUAL DINNER**

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

**Mr Mohamed Mohideen OAM JP**, President, Islamic Council of Victoria: our host for this evening

**Mr Josh Bull MP**, Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, **Representing the Premier**

**The Honourable David Coleman MP**, Federal Minister for Multicultural Affairs

**Mr Neil Angus MP**, Shadow State Minister for Multicultural Affairs

**Other Members of State and Federal Parliament**

**The Rt. Honourable Sally Capp** the Lord Mayor of Melbourne

**Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps**

**Ms Vivienne Ngyuen**, Chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission

**Mr Chin Tan, Race Commissioner**, Australian Human Rights Commission

**Distinguished religious leaders and 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 Elders with us this evening, and I thank Uncle Andrew Gardner for his generous Welcome to Country.

I am delighted to join you this evening. May I apologise that I am unable to stay throughout the dinner. We are hosting an event at Government House, but I was very keen to join you to say a few words.

It is important to me. I wanted to share some thoughts – the product of the very fortunate vantage-point I have as the Governor of Victoria.

First, I see what is so good and so strong about our community. I mean that in the broadest sense. I see clever industry and innovation. Smart technology. Outstanding universities and technical colleges. Helpful people. Kind and caring people and people who put themselves out to look after others.

But this evening I want to focus on what we see amongst our diverse community of Victorians. The successes. And the areas where we can always strive to improve.

No-one needs to persuade me why diversity matters. We are all enriched when we are alive to a broad range of people, experiences, talents and views.

A great part of Victoria's renowned liveability is, in my view, due to the fact that we come from around 230 different countries and 135 faith groups. That almost half of us were either born overseas or have one parent born overseas.

I am one of them. My father came from Europe between the two world wars. He raised us, first, to appreciate growing up in this country, and secondly, to do all that we could to ensure that we respect and live harmoniously with everyone: regardless of background.

I see countless examples of how we, as a community, do that so very well. So many interfaith and multicultural organisations working together. So many wonderful and highly motivated young people who work to ensure an open and harmonious future. So many sharing the vision of a socially inclusive home for us all.

I have seen first-hand ICV's contribution to that.

We have been hosted by the Council at an Iftar Dinner and been hosted in someone's home for another. We have worked hand in hand in identifying some of your best and brightest young people to attend Government House: to attend our own Iftar Dinner, to discuss how we can better contribute to social harmony, to bring different faith leaders together, to meet Royalty or just to ensure that our guests at the House are more representative of our diverse population.

It is from the same over-arching perspective – the same helicopter view, as it were – that I also see where we need to keep extending our efforts.

I doubt there is anyone here in this room who will disagree that we still encounter more ignorance, more distrust and more hatred than our community should ever believe is acceptable. Many of us here have seen it or felt it first-hand.

We all know that the cause is often fear. Not knowing or understanding each-other. Fear of difference. Fear of other. Fear that allows us to label or stereotype those and what we don't understand.

Fear that breeds distrust.

If I had the magic answer, I would be very happy (and, most likely, extremely rich!) Of course, I haven't. But I am not disheartened by that.

Lorraine Ngwenya, an impressive young Social Enterprise leader, at a large event we recently held for young Victorians to share their ideas on social harmony, wisely cautioned against thinking that we could find simple answers to complex problems.

She urged the young people at Government House to help to break down suspicion and fear, by starting conversations. And that the best way to start conversations is always to ask questions. And then, importantly, to listen to the answers that follow.

There is an old saying that *'An enemy is someone whose story you haven't heard.'* Implicit in that is that if we actively seek out and try to understand the stories of those whom we perceive as different to ourselves, we become exposed to their humanity – our common humanity. We are able to see people for much more than what they wear, what they eat or where or how they pray.

The concept of treating others as you would want to be treated – of loving your neighbour – can be found in the Bible, the Torah, the Ten Commandments, the Qur'an and the Hadith. Indeed, it can be found, expressed one way or another, in most major religions.

What can each one of us do? We can step up. Take a stand. Speak out against anything that undermines harmony and inclusiveness.

Not just when 'our own' are affected. Because, if any one group is undermined, if any one group is defamed or discriminated against, if any one group is ridiculed, disrespected or attacked, we are all diminished.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran theologian, threw down the gauntlet for us all when he said, *'Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.'*

We each need to speak. We each need to act. To stand up and to ensure that we individually and collectively do what we can, to support everyone's right to live with respect, harmony and safety.

May I take this opportunity to thank the ICV for what it does towards a more respectful, harmonious and safe Victoria. Thank you to each one of you who contributes so much time and skill to it.

And I thank your President, Mohamed Mohideen OAM, JP for all that he does, for his wisdom and for his friendship. I have said before that I am sure that if he and I were assigned the task, we could fix many of the world's problems in just one conversation.

We certainly share the same vision for our community.

Let's remain committed to working together. Let's remain vigilant about ensuring that our community continues to be enriched, not undermined by our diversity.

Let's be united in achieving the '*Peace and Prosperity*' of our State motto. For ourselves. And for the children that we all love and share.