



# Christchurch is Timely reminder to Swap Harmony Day for Harmony Week

The Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA) is calling upon the Australian government as well as states and territories to stop celebrating 21<sup>st</sup> March as Harmony Day.

“In 2003 ECCWA persuaded the then Premier Dr Geoff Gallop to change Harmony Day to Harmony Week, as 21<sup>st</sup> March is the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in commemoration of the Sharpeville Massacre” said Council President Mr. Ramdas Sankaran.

“Victoria and Tasmania have since followed WA’s example. However, our many requests to Australian governments of both persuasions to swap Harmony Day to Harmony Week and persuade all states and territories to do likewise have been ignored”, he added.

“The Christchurch massacre is a timely reminder to take the issue of Racial Discrimination seriously so that its extreme manifestations will never be repeated. We therefore urge Prime Minister Morrison to ensure that from 2020 the Australian government will swap Harmony Day to Harmony Week and persuade all states and territories to do likewise”, said Mr. Sankaran.

“Whilst our sordid White Australia past is deplorable, much of the gains we made by the bipartisan support for multiculturalism and equal opportunity legislation and mechanisms have unfortunately been trashed by incidents such as Tampa and Children Overboard, demonising of asylum seekers seeking refuge in Australia under international treaties ratified by it, attempts to delete Section 18c of the Racial Discrimination Act, Attorney General George Brandis’ assertion that Australians have the right to be bigots, Hanson’s Burqa stunt etc.”

“The Australian Government’s 2019 theme for its Harmony Day is ‘Everyone belongs’ and is meant to reinforce the importance of inclusiveness to all Australians.”

“Our Council agrees that inclusiveness can never be achieved without ALL Australians regardless of their ethnic/national origins, Aboriginality, faith, gender, disability, sexuality etc. having a sense of belonging but this will not happen without visionary leadership and resources being assigned to establish the necessary mechanisms and strategies to make our society fair, just and equitable”, he added.

“New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinta Ardern’s magnificent and compassionate leadership should be emulated by our political leaders as a matter of urgency. When she was speaking to the Muslim community she said ‘You are us’ and referred to the perpetrator as “This is not us” or “he is not us” and this puts ‘belonging’ into perspective”, said Mr. Sankaran.

“The multiculturalism scaffolding that the visionary Geoff Gallop implemented which comprised of the Multiculturalism Charter, and the Anti-racism Strategy as well as the Language Services and Substantive Equality policies, should as a matter of urgency, be updated and adopted nationally”, urged Mr. Sankaran

“A fundamental issue that needs to be urgently addressed is the focus on 1.5% of the period of human settlement in Australia given that archaeologists investigating the Moyjil site in Warrnambool, have estimated that indigenous people have been living in Australia for as long as 120,000 years. So how can we rely upon just what happened a little more than 200 years ago in determining our identity?” he asked.

The constitutional convention of 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders resolved, in the [‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’](#), to call for the establishment of a ‘First Nations Voice’ in the *Australian Constitution* and a ‘Makarrata Commission’ to supervise a process of ‘agreement-making’ and ‘truth-telling’ between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Australian government should forthwith reverse its decision not to implement the above so that we can move forward in a constructive and inclusive way”, said Mr. Sankaran.

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