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Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism
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Dear Committee Secretary

INQUIRY INTO STRENGTHENING MULTICULTURALISM
CLOSING DATE: 12 MAY 2017

Introduction

The Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University is the leading national research program on racism and anti-racism in Australia. It has a commitment to social justice and quality empirical research. The Challenging Racism Project has global esteem for its research impact in countering racism and improving community relations. Since 2001, members of the CRP have pursued research on experiences of racism and Australian attitudes to cultural diversity, bystander anti-racism, racism and discrimination in housing and education settings, cyber racism, countering violent extremism and Islamophobia.

Our research is particularly pertinent to understanding the experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as attitudes towards the migrant communities that help make us a multicultural nation. Because of this research, we are in a unique position to offer some recommendations regarding the strengthening of multiculturalism in Australia.

Terms of reference

A. The views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities;

In research we conducted on the normality, integration and ordinariness of Muslim Australians (*Ordinariness of Australian Muslims* report) we found strong indicators of Muslim integration into Australian society. We found that Muslim Australians expressed 'ordinary' desires in line with the broader attitudes and concerns of the rest of the population. We also found that civic participation is

high; 9 out of 10 Muslims have cross-cultural contact with Non-Muslims at work or in an education setting; and that Muslims have a strong association with their religion at the same time as expressing strong positive feelings towards integration and national belonging.

Our research over the last decade has shown high rates of experiences of racism for particular outgroups in Australian society, namely those who speak a language other than English, Muslim Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders'. These groups were almost twice as likely to experience racism as those who only speak English. 61% of Muslims said they experienced racism in the workplace (compared to 32% for all other respondents). 70% of Muslims stated they experienced racism on public transport or on the street (compared to 35% for all other respondents) (Table 1). In research we conducted on ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market, we found that Anglo-Australians were 4 times more likely than Indian or Middle Eastern renters to be offered an appointment to view a property. These figures show consistently higher rates of racism and discrimination. In a national survey we conducted in 2016, we found that 32% of respondents expressed they felt very negative or somewhat negative towards Muslims. 28% of respondents stated they would be extremely or very concerned if a family member married someone of the Muslim faith.

Table 1: Experiences of racism, varied settings, 2015-6, by Muslim and non-Muslims

		Total sample	Muslim respondents	Total sample	Muslim respondents	Total sample	Muslim respondents
		Never		Hardly ever-Sometimes		Often-very often	
Institutional settings	Workplace	67.2	39.8	27.7	45.2	5.1	15.1
	Education	67.2	38.7	26.8	40.9	6.0	20.4
	Housing	76.1	44.1	19.6	36.6	4.4	19.4
	Policing	76.5	23.9	19.6	45.2	3.8	11.8
	Health care	74.7	46.2	21.4	36.6	3.9	17.2
Everyday settings	Shop/restaurant	67.3	35.5	28.3	47.3	4.4	17.2
	Sporting event	73.6	44.1	22.6	39.8	3.8	16.1
	Public transport/ on street	65.2	30.1	29.3	47.3	5.5	22.6
	Online	70.9	34.4	23.6	34.4	5.4	31.2
	At home/friend's home	75.8	50.5	21.0	31.2	3.2	18.3

Source: Challenging Racism Project, National Survey 2015-2016

Our figures show that LOTE, Muslims Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders suffer a significant deficit when it comes to experiences of racism and discrimination in housing, the workplace, education and public settings. This suggests that multiculturalism has not yet extended to the fair and just treatment of CALD groups across institutional and everyday settings.

C. The adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes;

Cyber racism is an expanding yet relatively under-researched manifestation of racism. In 2013 it accounted for 41% of all racism complaints to the Australian Human Rights Commission (Emery 2014). Seven in ten Australians are active social media users (Carmody 2013), 86% of Australian

households access the internet (ABS 2014-2015). The Cyber Racism and Community Resilience (CRaCR) project has made some findings in this area, namely that the prevalence of cyber-racism is high, that the platforms of highest exposure to racism are Facebook, online news commentary and Youtube, and that Aboriginal Australians, followed by Middle Eastern Australians and Muslim Australians are the focus of cyber racism in Australia. However, there has been only limited study of the type, prevalence and impact of racially motivated crimes on online platforms. We are currently pursuing research that will fill this gap; we believe this kind of comprehensive study is required in order to adequately collect data on racially motivated crimes online.

Our assessment of the 27th April 2010 Cyber-Racism Summit, was that industry representatives were reluctant to contemplate proper reporting mechanisms on racism, and are not disposed towards funding the much needed data collection in this area. This has not changed substantially. Awan (2014: 147) observed: "In particular, Twitter has been criticized for a lack of real action toward online hate". Industry practice on racist complaints is non-transparent. We are interested in the responses of the platforms (e.g., Twitter) to racism, and what happens to complaints. Twitter and Facebook have recently acknowledged that racial violence is being incited in their platforms and have devised rules that proscribe such content. However emerging analyses of these rules have been quite critical of the extent to which Twitter is genuine about this prohibition given their lack of information about how they go about proscribing, filtering or removing content (Awan 2014). Reporting on racism is one of the core requirements on nation state parties as part of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which Australia operationalised through the Racial Discrimination Act, 1975 (RDA). Current practices around reporting and management of online racist content are idiosyncratic and are not transparent, nor public.

D. The impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;

Research has shown that the impact of discrimination and racism sees increased morbidities and higher rates of mental health concerns, particularly when it comes to repeated exposure to discrimination and racism. Global research has made a consistent link between mental ill-health and the ongoing and cumulative experience of racism (Williams and Mohammed 2009; Pascoe and Richman 2009; Brondolo et al. 2011; Conklin 2011; Goto et al. 2013; Schmitt et al. 2014; Paradies 2006). There is also evidence that racism is associated with economic costs within workplaces such as labour turn-over, absenteeism, and the regulatory costs associated with complaints resolution (LaVeist et al. 2011). Racism is also linked to political instability, giving rise to public dis-order and widespread civil disturbance (Noble 2009). Research shows that exposure to racism has deep impacts on feelings of self-worth and commitment to wider societal mores and values (CRaCR 2016). It has been asserted that racism can therefore undermine sense of belonging among target minority groups, undermining social cohesion and collective citizenship (Nelson et al. 2011).

One of the groups that suffer higher rates of racism is Australian Muslims. Our research has shown that Muslim Australians experience higher rates of racism, and while it might be assumed that this leads to feelings of not belonging, disaffection and wariness, our data shows no clear relationship exists. In fact, Muslim Australians expressed strong pro-diversity beliefs and a strong sense of national belonging. 72% agreed that Islam is consistent with Australian norms and society and 84%

stated they ‘feel Australian’. Despite the public discourse that the Islamic faith and Muslims do not ‘fit’ with the Australian way of life, our research has shown that Muslims can encompass both strong levels of religiosity and a strong sense of national belonging and integration.

Table 2: Views on pro-diversity and belonging, varied settings, 2012

	Strongly agree or agree	Neutral	Disagree or strongly disagree
Islam is consistent with Australian norms and society	71.7	13.5	14.8
Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Australia are friendly	61.6	23.3	15.1
Muslims are well-integrated into Australian society	61.8	20.2	18.1
I feel I am an Australian	83.8	10.5	5.8

Source: Challenging Racism Project, The Ordinariness of Australian Muslims survey

Our national survey found that 80% of respondents think cultural diversity is good for our society but there was also strong support for the proposition that cultural diversity is a threat to nationhood. 49% of respondents believe that people from racial, ethnic, cultural and religious minority groups should behave more like ‘mainstream Australians’ and 41% believe that Australia is weakened by people from different ethnicities sticking to their old ways. This indicates the ‘unfinished’ business of multiculturalism, that acceptance of cultural diversity extends to language, culture, festivals. However, there is less acceptance or acknowledgement of privilege and of systemic cultural disadvantage that give rise to consistent unevenness in terms of racism and life chances across cultural groups.

Table 3: Cultural and religious diversity and support for the nation, online survey, 2015-6

	Cultural diversity is good ¹	Ethnic diversity weakens nation ²	Support for assimilation ³
Agree	80.4	41.2	48.7
Neither agree/disagree	15.3	28.2	32.8
Disagree	4.4	30.6	18.5
Total	100	100	100

¹ Is it good for a society to be made up of different cultures
² Australia is weakened by people of different ethnicities sticking to their old ways
³ People from racial, ethnic, cultural and religious minority groups should behave more like mainstream Australians
Source: Challenging Racism Project, National Survey 2015-2016

E. The impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;

Our research has found deep distrust of the media, and to a lesser extent politicians’ treatment of Muslim Australians. 85% of Muslim respondents state that the media treats Muslims unfairly (*Muslim Community Attitudes Towards NSW Policing* report, 2016). This affirms the findings in our *Ordinariness* survey data which puts this figure at 80% (2012). Distrust of political leadership is also

significant, with the Prime Minister at the time, Tony Abbot seen as anti-Muslim by 55% of the respondents. The national level of distrust of the Prime Minister was a strong indicator of perceived political injustice. Given the reach of both the media and politicians to influence people's perceptions around Muslims and other LOTE groups, greater confidence in fair and just treatment by the media and political establishments is an imperative.

Table 4: Perceptions of media outlet dispositions towards Muslims, varied settings, 2015-6

	Pro-Muslim	Balanced	Anti-Muslim	Don't know	Total %*
ABC/SBS [Govt] television and radio news	9.2%	40.8%	25.5%	17.9%	93.4%
Commercial television and radio news	7.6%	19.6%	54.9%	10.9%	93.0%
Commercial talk-back radio	5.4%	16.3%	53.8%	17.4%	92.9%
Newspapers	4.9%	15.2%	59.8%	12.5%	92.4%
*Difference to 100% are 'No response'					
Source: Community Engagement Initiative Survey 2015					

The most effective way to counter poor media and political coverage of minority groups is to resource and train targeted groups to monitor media and to intervene as able. Content analysis can quickly and efficiently determine unfair media treatment of minority groups, and the same can be done for political discourse (media releases, speeches, online commentary, Hansard). These can provide the data on the public need for media monitoring. Minority groups poorly represented can be modestly resourced and trained to challenge poor treatment media and political discourse. They are able to monitor efficiently, to prepare media savvy voices, and to deploy facts and counter-stereotypical material in a professional manner. Specific training can include 'right of reply' requests, engagement (through letters, reply posts and tweets), as well as the appointment of media liaison officers, generating a stock of talent to be 'ordinary voices' for media, and the purposeful construction and dissemination of counter-constructions of stereotyped communities.

Table 5: Perceptions of political leaders' disposition towards Muslims, varied settings, 2015-6

	Pro-Muslim	Balanced	Anti-Muslim	Don't know	Total %
Prime Minister of Australia, Tony Abbott	2.2	19	54.9	15.8	91.9
Premier of NSW, Mike Baird	4.9	25.5	20.7	39.7	90.8
NSW Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Victor Dominello	4.3	25	18.5	45.1	92.9
Chair of the Community	3.3	20.1	11.4	56.5	91.3

Relations Commission on NSW, Harry Harinath					
*Difference to 100% are 'No response' Source: Community Engagement Initiative Survey 2015					

F. How to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;

We have previously stressed the importance of maintaining the standards set out in the Racial Discrimination Act (see our submission through CRaCR to the 'Inquiry into Freedom of Speech in Australia'). There is no empirical basis for changing these standards, and little public support (over 75% were opposed to changes being made to the RDA). We believe these standards are an important tool for putting a break on vilification and can work some way towards educating the public on the civility and respect required in a multicultural society. We would recommend expanding the current protections covering race and ethnicity to also include religious affiliation. With the catastrophic rise of Islamophobia in Australia, and the targeting of Muslims for discrimination and vilification, stronger standards are required to protect people against religious intolerance.

H. The potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation;

Enshrining laws to protect the rights of vulnerable populations has had a positive impact on Australian society. The Racial Discrimination Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Disabilities Discrimination Act and many others, have strengthened the social fabric of our society. Given the challenges we face as a multicultural nation, some of which we have mentioned above, we believe it is crucial to legislate around the issue of multiculturalism. This would include greater accountability and support (funding and otherwise) to organisations working in the area of multiculturalism, as well as setting targets and expectations to ensure these challenges are able to be met. Over the decade we have been conducting research in this area, it is clear to us that Australia's multiculturalism has 'unfinished' business. While we can show that many Australians accept cultural diversity, we still see high levels of discrimination and racism directed at CALD groups in Australia. This suggests our rhetoric does not always match our actions and attitudes. We believe that by enshrining principles of multiculturalism into legislation we provide the best opportunity to bridge this gap.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Policy, law and program reform needs to be made on the basis of empirical evidence on the views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities. Evidence above shows high levels of ongoing racism and discrimination.
- There is an urgent need to deepen and strengthen multiculturalism, particularly in terms of facilitating personal action, challenging privilege, confronting 'self' and 'other' dichotomies. Part of this would be re-framing the cultural and historical foundations of Australia to better represent the diversity of our nation.

- We recommend enshrining the principles of multiculturalism in legislation, as a means to progress the public discourse around discrimination and vilification and to ensure clear pathways for action and redress.
- Minority groups that can be shown to be the target of unfair media and political discourse should be resourced to media monitor and trained to counter stereotypical representations.
- Multicultural programs need proper resourcing. We need to move beyond 'harmless' and vacuous statements of principles to ensure multicultural organisations and programs are supported in their work, including setting targets and accountability, adequate funding, and strategic direction.

Yours sincerely

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Dr Rachel Sharples

On behalf of the Challenging Racism Project, Western Sydney University

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