

STATEMENT ON MULTICULTURALISM

The ugly scenes from Cronulla Beach and their aftermath are symptomatic of deeply disturbing 'us/them' dichotomies that are present in Australian society. They undermine values of fairness, compassion and tolerance, which have been hard won over more than 200 years. During this time Australia has experienced ongoing tension between the forces of exclusion and acceptance, culminating in a unique identity based on cultural diversity and inclusiveness. This has served Australia well and has spared us many of the troubles which have occurred in other parts of the world.

The alarming 'us versus them' attitudes expressed recently have been caused by unnecessary fear of the other. They stand in contrast to the very positive features of our nation. Mutual respect and acceptance of difference, always within the accepted norms of our political institutions and law, are values that should be treasured.

It is incumbent on all of us, especially our political and other community leaders, to continually seek to strengthen the unity of our culturally diverse Australian society. This can only take place against a background of harmony, mutual understanding and the tolerance that gives people space and time to grow into Australia, and Australia to welcome the contribution that they can offer. There needs to be an overriding commitment to Australia. The media also have a responsibility not to exploit and encourage the forces of ignorance and prejudice that we have lately witnessed. Australia has been internationally considered a haven of harmony and tolerance in which people are able to use their personal and cultural resources to develop themselves to the fullest and to make their contribution to the nation. Let us hold strongly to the values that have made us a nation united in diversity and a constructive member of the world community.

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