

**THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP CONFERENCE  
“FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP”**

**Friday 23 July 1999**

**CLOSING SPEECH BY THE HON PHILIP RUDDOCK, MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION  
AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS AND MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER  
FOR RECONCILIATION**

Thank you very much Kim, Robert Manne, many distinguished academics that I have seen and know, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here and I apologise very much for not being able to be here with you a little earlier. I left Australia on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June in order to speak at an international conference on population issues which was a continuation of the Cairo Conference of the United Nations. I had an opportunity after that to visit a number of countries where the issues that you were discussing today are very much issues for their own population as well as our own and I may offer some brief remarks about that in due course.

I understand very much the way in which this conference has addressed very constructively a wide range of issues that relate to my portfolio and it is in that context that I want to acknowledge, as I have no doubt you have, the traditional owners of the land we are on, the Wurunjerge people.

It has of course been a very successful, as I understand it, and stimulating conference –one in which you have dealt with a lot of very important concepts in relation to citizenship I think in a way which academics are want to. From me you will get a far more simplistic approach which is very much the way in which I address these sorts of questions. But before I move to talk about the issues, I want to congratulate the

University of Melbourne and Kim in particular for putting together this conference. It adds significantly to our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of Australian citizenship. It has given people, who have an interest in these matters, an opportunity to raise a lot of issues, particularly social issues that many would not have thought to be immediately relevant to citizenship. And in that context, I think that it has been a very useful occasion.

The importance of citizenship, as Robert Manne identified, is often seen in a fairly narrow context; that is of being our own distinctive identity as Australians and of course in 1949 we were able to for the first time to see ourselves as being Australian citizens as distinct from British subjects. To be an Australian in that sense for many is a matter of great passion. We are a multicultural society, we have brought people to this land from all over the world. This history was briefly articulated by Robert and no doubt discussed by others. Australia's composition at different stages has been quite varied. Today we have something like 40 to almost 50% of our population overseas-born or descendants of somebody who is overseas-born. We have something like 25% of our population actually overseas-born and something like 13-14% from non-English speaking background.

And while we rejoice in our multicultural character as a nation, in other words our rich diversity as something that we are all very much proud and that includes very much the rich diversity of Indigenous peoples, we, nevertheless, are passionate about being Australian. And we are not in that sense at all a nation of tribes. I think multiculturalism is something that ensures that that is the case. It is something very special and it has been the subject of a very detailed report that many of you may

know and by another Council -the Australian Multicultural Council - headed by Neville Roach. Their report which was recently tabled, brought forward a glowing endorsement, as I'm sure many of you noticed. But the fact is that under the Australian Citizenship Act, we have a concept of citizenship which brings with it rights and responsibilities that opens the door to many to be able to participate fully and has no doubt brought forward a very strong commitment to the civic values which we all share and which bind us together.

When I go out and talk about multiculturalism, I also talk about people being fellow Australians, because it brings together people with that common identity that we all share. There are two distinct themes that have been interrelated in this conference: the legal status, about which the Act deals with, and a broader one of civic identity. And I think that it is in this context that the wider range of issues that have been discussed here today have been particularly relevant.

Robert in his comments, and no doubt others, noted that something like 3.1 million people from over 180 different countries have chosen to make a commitment to Australia by taking out citizenship. And in that context it has been seen to be very successful. The fact is that some people take out citizenship very willingly and others –or often quite good and proper reasons- do not. I happen to believe that permanent residency and citizenship ultimately lead to successful settlement for people who do move from one country to another. If you look at some European countries, Germany in particular where people were seen to be temporary in terms of their presence and where citizenship was something that was very much withheld, you can see a situation

where the settlement process is often very much more difficult than it has been in Australia.

But for many to give up citizenship, which can be in the same way as it is for an Australian who takes up citizenship of another country –from some places- it can lead to quite significant economic loss and deprivation. In some other countries, it does not have that import. A number of countries, the UK, Italy, New Zealand, the US, do not strip their citizens of their citizenship if they acquire the citizenship of another country and that is obviously a factor in the take-up rate in Australia. For instance, the extent to which people from Japan take up citizenship. I think Japan in fact, has the lowest take-up rate of any national group that has in fact settled in Australia.

We want our citizenship to be inclusive. We want to remove barriers and discriminatory provisions and we have largely done that; say for some of the questions that Robert raised about whether or not we should strip people retrospectively of rights and entitlements that they continue to enjoy. Obviously that is an issue that the Parliament addressed in 1984 when for new settlers from the UK and elsewhere who held British subject status the entitlement to participate on our electoral system was removed. Our approach does remain non-discriminatory. We see citizenship as reflecting the very important role of nation building for what is in fact one of the major migrant-receiving countries in the world. It is significant for people to participate. I find, having attended many citizenship ceremonies over a long period of time, that they are significant occasions, very, very passionately in terms of the involvement for people who take out Australian citizenship and of course the affirmation for those Australians born here. There has been a pilot, encouraged by the

Council, a pilot because it was thought it may be fraught with danger, it may lead citizenship ceremonies to be the subject of ridicule if you are asking those who have been born here to make an affirmation at one of those occasions. The fact is that on each of the occasions in which it has been offered, it has been enthusiastically participated in by people who had taken out their citizenship before or by those who have been born here in Australia. An affirmation ceremony was held on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations in the Albert Hall in Canberra. It was done at the first citizenship ceremony on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January this year in which I participated at Hornsby and it has been done on a number of other occasions and there is a form of modified pledge which people are invited to take and I think it demonstrates in a very real way the passion that people have about being Australian and identifying as Australian and wanting to have an opportunity to affirm that. And I'm sure that that experiment we have been conducting is something that will be more widely accepted in time and utilised.

I would like to talk about the wider concepts of citizenship as they have been addressed; that is the idea of shared civic values and the civic identity which underpins our society. It is quite clear that over the last 50 years there has been perhaps little debate about these issues and the concept of citizenship. But in more recent days there has been a great deal of interest not only in my portfolio but in the education area, for example through Cheryl Saunders' group dealing with the Centenary of Federation. There has been a good deal of discussion about citizenship. In fact it was one of Sir Ninian's early forays into this area through the Centenary of Federation issues that prompted me to invite him to chair the review of Australian citizenship. It was an area on which he had written well before this inquiry had

commenced and well before he spoke to you so well at the beginning of this conference. But the fact is as you have identified in this conference and Robert articulated, even though we had from 1949 Australian citizenship, particularly for our Indigenous people, rights which may have been expected to flow automatically did not occur. And it is still the case that for some who are Australian citizens the rights that they obtain to participate in our society are not necessarily equal in every respect. The right to sit in our Parliament it is not one that all citizens have. If you are a citizen of Australia but you owe some other loyalty or have some other citizenship –and that is the issue the High Court has been trying to grapple with- you cannot sit in our Parliament even though you may be able to vote. Often people assume you are able to obtain access to our social security system on an absolutely equal basis but the fact is that if you are overseas-born you cannot obtain access to an age pension in Australia until you have been here for 10 years. So you can acquire citizenship earlier; it won't give you eligibility for an age pension because there is a 10 year preclusion period. Now, those sorts of issues are there in addition to matters that were raised relevant to Indigenous people in particular, and these are matters that we as Australian need to work through and obviously in the context that I have established the Council many of these questions will be the subject of a comprehensive review and useful comment.

The fact is that while the term citizenship encapsulates an understanding of Australian history, its democratic institutions, its laws and its wider social development, it implies a commitment to fundamental principles and institutions which do guide our society. And these include our commitment to the rule of law, the constitution and equality under the law for Australians; a commitment to maintaining Australia as a

liberal, tolerant society, an active parliamentary democracy and a commitment to strengthening Australia as a fair and harmonious multicultural society.

So at this time of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Australian citizenship, how we want the concept of citizenship and Australian citizenship policy and law to serve us, is a matter appropriate for reflection. We do need to ask ourselves how we can enlarge our ideas of citizenship and make them even stronger and I think this has been very much the feature of this Conference.

To go forward for the next 50 years there are many issues we need to consider. The first is how we use ideas of citizenship to enrich our democracy; What are the shared values that underlie our society and how we promulgate them; How we can ensure that our ideas of Australian citizenship are genuinely inclusive; How the ideas of citizenship can play a part in the process of reconciliation; How we can best use Australian citizenship as a unifying factor in our diverse and multicultural society?

In relation to the legal status of Australian citizenship, should we loosen or tighten the criteria for a grant of citizenship? Should Australians continue to lose their citizenship if they take up that of another country? And of course we need to think about our symbols and of course how we mesh Australian concepts of citizenship with the other developing concepts of citizenship around the world.

Now, it has been mentioned that I established the Council to look at these issues. I am very gratified by the many distinguished Australians from a great many walks of life - including one of our Indigenous Australians- that have been prepared to sit and deliberate along with Robert Manne and Sir Ninian Stephen on the issue of

citizenship. I have no doubt their report will be a very valuable one. Robert in his comments mentioned to you today my role as Minister assisting the Prime Minister on the process of reconciliation and also my role as Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. I was very concerned when I was appointed minister, that there be no assumption that the issues that are relevant to our society under the broad banner of multicultural policies and programs in any way be seen to compromise our responsibilities to Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The issues are not the same and they shouldn't be seen to be the same. The fact that in my title I am separately the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on Reconciliation was to put that beyond doubt. I think the process of reconciliation in which we are involved is a very important one. It is as Robert identified in his comments to you; it is important the way in which we see ourselves as a nation, the way in which we see ourselves as a people.

I did take the opportunity recently travelling abroad to look at some of these issues and the way in which they are addressed elsewhere. Because one often believes that the approach that we are embarked upon is very much behind the eighth ball, long overdue and that others have done it so much better. I had no doubt in the discussion that has taken place here that you have received many encouraging comments to ways and means in which we can undertake this task more effectively than we do, and that is appropriate, it is encouraging. I think, as the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation undertakes its important consultations Australia-wide, that the widest possible

participation and discussion is going to be a key as to whether or not we are going to put some of these issues behind us.

But do not address them in the context of believing that these are not problems that affect Indigenous people generally. I was astonished in the United States of America to find that for the first time in 60 years an American president visited an Indian reserve in the last few weeks. The last American president to do so was Roosevelt. Many people have commented about the establishment of a new territory in Canada and suggested that separate governance arrangements are likely from what has happened there. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is not proposed for other Indigenous groups in Canada and it is seen as public governance -that is, the same governance arrangements that you may have for the Australia Capital Territory or the Northern Territory- or to split the Northern Territory into parts, any one of those parts. But it was not seen as a separate governance arrangement for people on the basis of their race. I was very much surprised at the extent to which the rim and landholdings of the Indian populations of South America are the subject of such widespread challenge even today, and I use those terms very deliberately. We are not talking about a wider class of land entitlements that our Indigenous people are commencing to enjoy but remnant entitlements that are being stripped away. And finally, the most fascinating debate in New Zealand is about whether or not one ought to have a bicultural approach and whether multiculturalism as a public policy could sit comfortably with Indigenous entitlements. That is not a matter that is being questioned in Australia. I think in that sense for many who have settled in New Zealand the fact that people are saying that you cannot have multiculturalism is inconsistent with the biculturalism that flows from accepting responsibilities for an Indigenous community. It is not a path that we choose and one that I am glad we have

not. I am glad today to have had this opportunity to address you and to speak about Australian citizenship. As you have no doubt detected from what I have to say, I have a passionate interest in it and I am glad that you have shared that in this Conference.

I m glad that it has given so many of you the opportunity to discuss a wider range of issues in such a positive way and I will be more than happy as I understand you may want to have questions directed to Robert to submit myself to whatever ordeal that you may have in mind as well.