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ADDRESS TO THE SETTLEMENT CONFERENCE 2016

ZINC, FEDERATION SQUARE, MELBOURNE

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*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we met today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to their elders both past and present.

Thank you Con for that introduction and thanks to the Settlement Council.

To Dewani and Eugenia, this wonderful event is testament to the hard work you and your team at the Settlement Council have put in.

Attracting international experts to share and learn from, while showcasing Australia's settlement institutions is a valuable contribution.

The Settlement Journey

The settlement journey defines modern Australia. We are a nation unlike any other because of it.

The processes and numerous visas we have facilitate the act of immigration to Australia. They allow a person to arrive.

But settlement is where roots grow, where bonds form and where new migrants become new Australians.

This is a journey that people from across the world undertake for different reasons.

A new job, perhaps from an economic opportunity not afforded elsewhere.

A family connection, representing a successful migration story of years earlier.

The opportunity to study at a world-class institution.

Or a pathway that was not chosen, someone whose life has been on hold in a refugee camp, awaiting any opportunity for a new beginning.

These are how Australia's new migrants arrive. But a visa is simply the start.

This should never be forgotten. Behind every number, in each report that comes out of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection is a person.

And the settlement journey of these people is the most underappreciated phenomenon shaping Australia today.

It is what happens in the period between the first steps new migrants take in Australia through to their citizenship, where hopefully they feel welcome in their country.

Bob Hawke has said the great influx of migrants after World War Two is the most defining feature of Australia today. And he is right.

But it's only because those people stuck around, built their lives here, and gave everything to a new, strange land that this became true.

So, because of this, it is our responsibility to ask:

How are new migrants settling today?

Do they see opportunity and feel empowered to act on it?

What are the barriers we need to break down?

These questions and the answers that emerge have played and will continue to play a critical role in Australia's future because they shape the settlement journey.

The Immigration Framework

I want to speak briefly on our immigration framework.

Our immigration framework today is very different to the period Bob Hawke spoke about.

As many in this room will know intimately, immigration to Australia looks very different today than the 1980s.

An old system where governments controlled every facet of the process has given way to one where employers, universities, and migrants themselves determine how many people come to Australia each year.

Australia has amongst the highest immigration growth across the OECD.

Some are concerned about this trend; worried Australia cannot take a growing population.

Often migrants wear the blame in our society for very real issues, albeit ones they did not cause.

But if we invest properly – funding infrastructure, making our cities work effectively, getting the labour market right, protecting our environment – we have nothing to fear from more people.

There is opportunity in immigration.

Yet while our immigration programs have shifted, there has been less recognition of what this means for settlement.

Have the changes in immigration policy translated into appropriate models of support for settlement?

In some respects, the answer is yes. Yet we know this has not occurred as fully as we could have hoped for, particularly over the last three years.

There was a time in the 1970s and 1980s where the majority of new migrants were entitled to government support as an investment in their future.

Today, only a small minority of new migrants receive support from governments.

Of course, not every single new migrant to Australia today needs government support.

Many skilled migrants find their way without any help from governments.

Families and community members help soften the landing.

But we all know the importance of support in those first months and years.

Labor's Investment

I'm concerned about the growing disjuncture between immigration and settlement.

I believe we need to know more about what investment is needed, not less.

Governments alone cannot determine what the relationship between new migrants and society will be. They cannot ensure success by themselves. That job requires a community to come together.

But governments can invest in the process, giving the settlement journey the best possible opportunity to succeed.

And Labor governments have a proud recent tradition in investing in settlement.

Labor funded new models for the Humanitarian Settlement Support program, promoting orientation and local area coordination to best assist new humanitarian migrants in the first months of their life in Australia.

It was a Labor Government that funded new courses in the Adult Migrant English Program, like the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training, helping new migrants who want a job.

And it was Labor who created new programs like the Complex Case Support program, providing intense case management for the most vulnerable.

Labor is not afraid to make these investments because they pay for themselves over the long-term.

Today, I renew this Labor tradition.

Office for Multicultural Affairs

A Bill Shorten Labor Government will create an Office for Multicultural Affairs in the Department of Social Services.

This Office will oversee the management of settlement programs, promote research and evaluation, coordinate across the Federal Government and, most importantly, get settlement policy right for the future.

An Office for Multicultural Affairs will help us think about what settlement means today and answer the big questions.

Have we got it right?

What are the needs of new migrants today?

Are eligibility criteria appropriate for service provision?

How can we respond to setbacks in social cohesion?

The Office will ensure immigration trends and settlement trends are aligned.

Labor will ensure the links between immigration and settlement remain at the heart of our nation-building story.

And I do not accept the premise that Australia has finished writing this story.

Some very significant chapters have been written but there are many more to come.

A strong voice for settlement, coordinated by the Office for Multicultural Affairs, will demonstrate this commitment and work across the public service to ensure areas like health and education are fully aware of the potential of multiculturalism.

Labor's Investment for the Future

To maintain and improve our settlement institutions – including the organisations represented here in this room – new investment from government is required.

Labor will invest in new capital measures for the settlement and multicultural sectors.

One of the first tasks of the Office of Multicultural Affairs will be to deliver \$11.3 million worth of new capital infrastructure and \$7.5 million worth of human capital.

Labor will fund a capital works program for settlement and multicultural organisations.

Too many organisations support the settlement journey from buildings in need of repair.

This \$11.3 million investment will fund renovations, redevelopments and new buildings to help organisations support the settlement of new migrants.

In 2013, one of the first acts of the Abbott Government was to slash the Building Multicultural Communities program. Hundreds of organisations that had successfully applied for funding were told their grants didn't exist anymore.

This ripped away new facilities from the grassroots organisations, stymieing support for new migrants.

Nothing could provide a more stark contrast between Labor and the Abbott-Turnbull Government.

In addition, Labor will invest in the people who support new migrants in Australia today.

Capacity building is a somewhat overused bureaucratic term these days, however nothing could be more important than nurturing human capital in the settlement sector to better support new migrants.

From community leadership to volunteer management to bilingual engagement, the skills needed to support new migrants settle are critical.

For too long, these skills have been undervalued.

Labor will invest \$7.5 million to help further build this human capital, to grow the capacity of the settlement sector, supporting those who help guide our new migrants.

Some people may question why this investment is required today.

2016-17 will likely see the largest humanitarian program in more than a generation.

I fondly remember that wonderful week in Canberra last year when there was almost a competition based on generosity. The decision to accept an additional 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian migrants was the right one.

But the way the pace at which this is being done is far too slow. And we do need to see that commitment, as wonderful as it was last year, be delivered by the Government now and into the future.

And while I'm in awe of the organisations supporting humanitarian migrants, it would be unfair to ask them to undertake this role without additional investment.

A society where social cohesion and economic inclusion thrives does not happen by accident. Hard work and properly funded investment is required.

Governments must maintain a strong role, identifying how best to support and then funding that support.

Social Cohesion and Economic Inclusion

I want to finish on why this investment is important, what happens when all those hundreds of thousands of individual settlement pathways mesh together.

Deep, bitter division in Australian society does not exist however we are not perfect. We have been largely successful to date in working hard to support a cohesive society.

Each year, the Scanlon Foundation's excellent reports detail the trends.

They show us a strong foundation while identifying areas of concern.

85 per cent of people believe multiculturalism has been a good thing for Australia yet at the same time, nearly one in five migrants experience discrimination.

A central point – the Office of Multicultural Affairs – combined with renewed investment will help ensure social cohesion remains well supported by the Federal Government.

We only need to look at countries like the United States and the United Kingdom where we see what can occur when social cohesion is soft and divided.

This points to the fundamental strength of Australia's labour market and economic opportunity.

Migrants to Australia succeed because they are afforded opportunities, alongside people who already live here.

In fact, the kids of new migrants to Australia are amongst the very best performers at school in the world.

But this is not just a success story for migrants but for everyone in Australia.

The Migration Council's report – the Economic Impact of Migration – demonstrates just how important migrants are to Australia.

By 2050, the Australian economy will be 40 per cent larger due to migration and growth per person will be nearly 6 per cent larger.

Yet this is all projected on the status quo.

What if we can invest to get more spouses speaking English?

What if we can get migrants with qualifications from their homeland recognised in Australia?

We can do better by investing in the settlement of Australia's new migrants, improving their experience but also our own.

Conclusion

What does the 21st century settlement journey look like?

It means social and economic opportunities for those who come to Australia.

It means knowing what we do well and working out how to improve.

It means investing in people because we're all in this together.

We need to look outward.

We need to engage.

Isolation and looking inwards are not the answers and they never have been.

Australia is unique but not above and beyond reproach.

Our multiculturalism works because we work at it.

Community groups, businesses, not for profits, governments and migrants themselves most of all.

Labor knows the way forward and will invest in our shared settlement journey.

We're in this together.

Thank you.