



AfricanImprints

WORKING WITH VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY

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MEDIA RELEASE

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African Think Tank condemns councillor Brown's denigrating African refugees comments

Councillor Peter Brown's (Letters 9/1/07) inflammatory contribution to a media campaign singling out and denigrating African refugees deserves the condemnation it has drawn from a variety of informed sources (Letters 11/1/07). The attitude and arguments advanced in Councillor Brown's letter contradict his assertion that "Australia has a proud history of social justice, understanding and harmony and embracing of multicultural values." He demonstrates little sense of social justice by vociferously publicly condemning not just the vulnerable, newly arrived Sudanese community, but Melbourne's entire, diverse African community, and indeed the whole continent of "Black Africa," for a weekend incident in which one offender was apprehended. Social justice is premised foremost on justice, never on race. There is no justice in collective racially-based punishment, as demonstrated by the tragic lessons of World War II.

Councillor Brown and his fellow travellers' unjust bigotry seeks to tarnish the reputation and destroy the dignity of an entire community, inciting suspicion and hostility towards all Africans to drive a wedge between them and the mainstream community with whom Africans deeply desire friendship, and a true place of belonging.

It is extraordinarily insensitive and objectionable for Councillor Brown to infer Africans are "Australians of convenience." It demonstrates he is not informed by adequate understanding of, and interactions with, Africans here to see they are so grateful to Australia, and committed to doing their best to contribute in return for the gift of life here. They are enthusiastic for Australian citizenship to become fully participating members of the society, and to feel fully accepted as Australians. Unfortunately, Councillor Brown does not seem able to accept that racial differences are superficial and irrelevant to the positive character, qualities and commitment in a person's heart. If there is difficulty in African refugees being integrated, it is not due to their lack of desire to be members of the mainstream, but due to the irrational hostility and rejection expressed by the likes of Councillor Brown. A requirement for leadership in a harmonious, modern democracy is the capacity to lead positively and with insight for

all community members, not to dismember ethnically defined communities from inclusion in the broader society.

In revising Cronulla to erroneously suggest it was due to new-comers marching down the road to Keysborough is as alarmist as it is insulting to the intelligence of those who expect truth and rigour in public discourse.

Conducting racist campaigns is always abhorrent, however they are cloaked or rationalised. Australia indeed has a proud history of giving short shrift to those who are so inhumane to their fellow man and woman as to judge and malign them on the colour of their skin. That, Councillor Brown, is the reasons Africans have chosen to come here. The friendly land of the 'fair go' represented a land of healing, welcoming smiles and opportunity to study, work, contribute and live in the peace we have so long craved. Would you deny us that in the determination to diminish our community's chances to fit in and live in dignity?

In response to the settlement challenges, however, the African Think tank Inc has organised a national conference to be held in April 2007 at The University of Melbourne. We encourage any concerned individuals, agencies and government bodies to utilise this opportunity to find collective response to address settlement challenges of refugees in Australia. Further Information can be obtained by visiting the conference website (<http://www.union.unimelb.edu.au/conferences/att>) or contact conference management on telephone 03 8344 3682 or email heather.wringe@union.unimelb.edu.au

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