



African Think Tank Inc.

WORKING WITH VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY

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TEACHING MUST COME BEFORE TESTING SAY AFRICAN REFUGEES

Dr Berhan Ahmed, Chairperson of the African Think Tank, has welcomed news that Australia's new citizenship test is up for review by the new Federal Government.

"This is another positive sign for the migrant and refugee communities from the Rudd Government to bring in the New Year," Dr Ahmed said.

New Immigration Minister, Chris Evans, confirmed on Tuesday that the test, introduced by the former Howard government, would be reviewed after revealing that more than one in five applicants had failed to meet the necessary 60% pass mark since its introduction in October 2007.

"Unfortunately, we are not surprised that the failure rate among those taking the test is so high," Dr Ahmed said, "because the nature of the testing process was always going to be problematic."

"By focusing on obscure facts and value interpretations that would confound many Australian-born citizens, the test is not only onerous and ambiguous, but completely antithetical to the traditional Aussie spirit of inclusion and a fair go for all."

Dr Ahmed said, "Africans in this country are eager to learn about Australian culture and become proficient in English, but it makes sense that teaching must come before testing."

"If the Australian Government genuinely believes that some kind of formal test improves awareness of a citizen's rights and responsibilities, then the first step must be to provide practical, accessible, and culturally appropriate educational opportunities that deliver the knowledge outcomes that both the applicants and wider society desire and require."

“Otherwise the whole citizenship testing process is like putting the cart before the horse.” Under the current citizenship laws, applicants must pass a 20-question quiz on Australian history, values and way of life, and demonstrate an adequate knowledge of English.

“We look forward to the Government introducing a less cumbersome and discriminatory process for attaining citizenship in the near future.” According to the Immigration Department, 2,311 out of 10,636 people (more than 20%), failed the citizenship test since 1 October 2007.

African Think Tank Inc

Mobile: 0405 479 275

E: africanthinktank@hotmail.com