



**THE HON. BILL SHORTEN
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
MEMBER FOR MARIBYRNONG**

SPEECH

ISLAMIC MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA ANNUAL GALA DINNER

MELBOURNE

SATURDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2015

I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet.

You're all distinguished guests, but I would like to acknowledge the Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, I think she has been most distinguished in this government.

There is a lot of history in this room, but there's a little bit of history sitting just near me – it's Ed Husic, the first Federal Muslim Australian MP.

A museum is an opportunity where the past and the present merge and provide us the basis for our future.

And I was thinking about my family's history

My Mum passed away last year.

About six decades ago, when she was finishing high school, she went to apply for a job at a supermarket in Ballarat.

She was refused a job – because she was Catholic, and they were only hiring protestants.

My Mum was a very smart woman, she was brought up believing that hard work and merit that is what counts and everything else is irrelevant – but to the man at the supermarket who said 'there's no job for you', none of this merit or ability mattered.

Sixty years ago, there were people in this country who could not look past her faith.

That was what defined her, this was all that some people saw, her religion and only that.

I say that, in part, to reassure people that there is a lot now which has in fact been around for a long time – and to be reassured also by the progress we have made.

But I also understand as we gather here to celebrate the genius, the strength of the cultural and faith-based contribution to Australia that people of Muslim Australian background have made, it is true that we are living in uncomfortable times.

And we do ourselves no favours by not acknowledging that.

I understand the frustration that people in the community feel.

It is true to say that there is a rise in racism towards Muslim Australians that needs to be called for what it is.

There are some people – like the man my mother encountered all those years ago– who cannot see beyond someone's faith.

These are some people who would question the loyalty of someone to their homeland, to their community because they have a different faith.

People who would seek to use the actions of a tiny violent, criminal, corrupt minority, to underestimate the contribution of hundreds of thousands of Australians.

I believe, and I know my friend Julie Bishop believes this, this is not a partisan comment - that leadership is not the opportunity to give permission to some in a majority to start having negative views about people in minorities.

And I can reassure you, that when I sit in the Parliament, there is an absolute desire, by many, to ensure that the voices intolerance and prejudice do not speak for 21st Century Australia.

The Koran tells us: "*Narrate to them the stories so that upon them they may reflect*"

Our shared Australian story, of modern multicultural life, is a story for us to reflect on.

It is a story of:

Hope over fear.

Inclusion over intolerance.

Understanding over suspicion.

Our differences should not divide us, they should inspire us.

They remind us that in Australia, we all have right to take pride in our heritage, to draw strength from our faith.

For all of us, religion is a base to build upon, it is not a destination to retreat into.

Friends, I understand Islam *is* a religion of peace.

I have heard many Muslim leaders say this - and I know they mean it.

No communities need a lecture to know that there is no justification, no excuse for perpetrating acts of violence against the innocent – we know this.

Defeating the scourge of fanaticism, overcoming hatred, protecting the people we love from those who would do us harm...that is fundamental to the functions of our society.

But the best way to do this is for us to work together.

Not to divide by how we worship, or where we come from.

There will be hard days ahead – but none of us should ever lose faith in Australia.

We may be drawn from every flag and every faith on earth, but we are not a patchwork country capable of being torn apart at the seams.

We are an alloy - we are a stronger and better nation because we are forged from the best of every culture and every tradition.

This is the national gift.

I had the real distinction of meeting Ahmed's parents earlier. They must be so proud of their sons and daughters.

You reminded me that all of us give our children the inheritance of a very special country.

We understand that be you Australian by birth or Australian by choice – we have an obligation to preserve our society, we do not tolerate extremism or fanaticism, in whatever form it presents.

We also need to jealously guard our social cohesion, that's what keeps us happy and safe.

The front line of dealing with extremism is within the community, and I just want to say that I for one – and many like me – are incredibly grateful.

Tonight, all of you here, all the work that has been done for the museum, tells me that we do have a vision we share.

This museum celebrates the past and the present – and it shows me that we have a dream for the future.

Thank you very much