



Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (Inc.)

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Media Release

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Team Australia *Seriously?*

Prime Minister Tony Abbott's outburst in calling on moderate Muslims to join the "Team Australia" fight against locally bred extremistsⁱ is grossly intemperate for the leader of a nation that values multiculturalism. The Prime Minister claimed that "It's not about protecting one group of Australians from another group of Australians." If this is so why then did he single out the Muslim community and no other Australians?

Singling out Muslim Australians in such a way as the former Treasurer Peter Costello has noted in his regular column has missed the point.ⁱⁱ In that column Mr. Costello observes, "I don't know about this Team Australia stuff, I have heard it used in tourist and trade promotions. But as far as I am concerned, when it comes to stopping terrorism, it is not a matter of getting on the team."

ECCWA and the vast majority of Australian Muslims share his view that, "fighting terror is the obligation of all Australians. Protecting innocents against terrorism is not an opt-in or opt-out activity. It is the irrevocable obligation of every citizen in a civilized country."

Thanks to the pressures brought to bear by numerous ethnic community agencies including ECCWA, the Australian Labor Party, the Greens and a few coalition Members of the parliament specially Mr. Ken Wyatt, the Prime Minister was forced to dump the proposed changes to section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act which was being championed by his Attorney General. Astoundingly, the Prime Minister sought to "save face" by his decision to link the 18C decision to the counterterrorism laws. As the former treasurer noted "to suggest that somebody, anybody, would decline to cooperate in the fight against terrorism because they didn't like the repeal of a section like this in the Racial Discrimination Act, is truly frightening."

As the global media usually reflects back on post 9/11 era in September it should be acknowledged that it were these groups that stand together to promote intercultural harmony and inter faith dialogues bringing communities closer. One of the most recent examples we have seen is the Muslim Students Association at the University of Western Australia; as soon as they were aware of the background of their invited speaker, they immediately withdraw their invitation just like the Premier Collin Barnett did not welcome the Danish speaker in Western Australia. This is how we need to work.

If the Coalition parties are serious about their "Team Australia" sentiments, it's high time they had a good look at the institutional racism that is being perpetuated at the state and national levels in Australia rather than pointing fingers at the communities without any concrete evidence.

By way of example is the decision of the former WA Minister for Multicultural Interests, John Castrili

to deprive ECCWA of its core funding which has been described as the institutional racism by its member organizations, a view that Hon. Kim Hames and other Liberal candidates present at the meeting also agreed. Sadly, the current Minister for Multicultural Interests Dr. Mike Nahan is yet to take action to end that discrimination despite repeatedly acknowledging the great work that this organization is doing. Joint efforts at broader level and not singling out communities are the need of the time and will get value for the money if someone is listening.

ⁱ <http://thenewdaily.com.au/news/2014/08/18/pm-muslims-join-team-australia/>

ⁱⁱ [http://www.petercostello.com.au/media/Daily_Telegraph - Rights or plain old politics - 12 Aug 2014.pdf](http://www.petercostello.com.au/media/Daily_Telegraph_-_Rights_or_plain_old_politics_-_12_Aug_2014.pdf)