

*Federal
Parliamentarians'
Code of Race Ethics*

*- a contribution towards
a more tolerant Australia*

December 1998

Background

The *Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics* evolved out of concern about the level of racism introduced into the 1996 Federal Election Campaign and a petition brought to the Parliament by Aboriginal people from Ipswich calling upon parliamentarians to 'represent all of their constituents without racial discrimination, fear or favour'. After a unanimous resolution of the Senate in May 1996, the Code was developed over a six-month period with the support of parliamentarians and community leaders from across the political spectrum.

Ideas for the *Code of Race Ethics* were adapted from:

- Politicians and Citizens Roles and Responsibilities, John Warhurst, Catholic Social Justice Series 1995;
- Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, August 1993; and
- A submission relating to a Code of Practice for Parliamentarians, Hon Kevin Rozzoli, Speaker of the NSW Parliament, to I.C.A.C., 1991.

The *Code of Race Ethics* was presented in December 1996 to a broad spectrum of Australia's religious and ethnic community leaders in a ceremony at Parliament House, Canberra, which acknowledged the initial 57 signatory parliamentarians' commitment to promote harmony in Australian society.

In 1997 the Code was incorporated into the Tasmanian House of Assembly Standing Orders. It was also endorsed by the then Queensland Opposition Leader now Premier, Peter Beattie, both South Australia's Premier John Olsen and Leader of the Opposition Mike Rahn, and Chief Minister of the ACT, Kate Carnell. It has since been endorsed by New South Wales Premier Bob Carr, Victorian Opposition Leader John Brumby, Western Australian Opposition Leader Geoff Gallop, ACT's Opposition Leader Jon Stanhope and Northern Territory Opposition Leader Maggie Hickey.

In September 1998, the Code of Race Ethics was sent out to all 1435 candidates in the Federal Election. Within the three-week time frame allocated before the election, the total number of candidates who had endorsed the code reached 553. In an effort to give electors the chance to vote for non-racist candidates, Queensland signatories' names were published in *The Courier Mail* on the Friday before the election, and the national list of all signatories was forwarded to all major newspapers and ethnic media organisations. The full list of signatories was also available on the Web at:
http://www.antar.org.au/race_ethics .

Of the newly elected parliament, 121 Members and Senators* (54%) are now signatories to the code. As parliamentarians approach the new century, we will be addressing significant issues relating to multiculturalism, reconciliation and Australia's place in the Asia Pacific region. Our goal is that by the Centenary of Federation, *all* elected Federal Members and Senators will be signatories to the *Code of Race Ethics*.

Senator Margaret Reynolds

Senator John Woodley

* as at 1/12/98

Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics

As a member of the Australian Federal Parliament I agree:

- 1) To act in a manner which upholds the honour of public office and the parliament;*
- 2) To respect the religious and cultural beliefs of all groups living within Australia in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;*
- 3) To uphold principles of justice and tolerance within our multicultural society making efforts to generate understanding of all minority groups;*
- 4) To recognise and value diversity as an integral part of Australia's social and economic future;*
- 5) To help without discrimination all persons seeking assistance;*
- 6) To speak and write in a manner which provides factual commentary on a foundation of truth about all issues being debated in the community and the parliament;*
- 7) To encourage the partnership of government and non-government organisations in leading constructive and informed debate in the community;*
- 8) To promote reconciliation with indigenous Australians.*

Signatories to the *Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics*

House of Representatives

Australian Capital Territory

Annette Ellis (Canberra)

Bob McMullan (Fraser)

New South Wales

Anthony Albanese (Grayndler)

Kerry Bartlett (Macquarie)

Laurie Brereton (Kingsford-Smith)

Janice Crosio (Prospect)

Laurie Ferguson (Reid)

Tim Fischer (Farrer)

Joel Fitzgibbon (Hunter)

Jill Hall (Shortland)

Kelly Hoare (Charlton)

Joe Hockey (North Sydney)

Colin Hollis (Throsby)

Bob Horne (Paterson)

Julia Irwin (Fowler)

Jackie Kelly (Lindsay)

Mark Latham (Werriwa)

Tony Lawler (Parkes)

Michael Lee (Dobell)

Jim Lloyd (Robertson)

Stephen Martin (Cunningham)

Robert McClelland (Barton)

Leo McLeay (Watson)

Daryl Melham (Banks)

Allan Morris (Newcastle)

Frank Mossfield (Greenway)

Brendan Nelson (Bradfield)

Tanya Plibersek (Sydney)

Roger Price (Chifley)

Danna Vale (Hughes)

Northern Territory

Warren Snowdon (Northern Territory)

Queensland

Arch Bevis (Brisbane)

Mal Brough (Longman)

Craig Emerson (Rankin)

Gary Hardgrave (Moreton)

Cheryl Kernot (Dickson)

Kirsten Livermore (Capricornia)

Margaret May (McPherson)

Bernie Ripoll (Oxley)

Kevin Rudd (Griffith)

Con Sciacca (Bowman)

Alex Somlyay (Fairfax)

Queensland (cont.)

Kathy Sullivan (Moncrieff)

Wayne Swan (Lilley)

South Australia

David Cox (Kingston)

Martyn Evans (Bonython)

Rod Sawford (Port Adelaide)

Patrick Secker (Barker)

Tasmania

Dick Adams (Lyons)

Duncan Kerr (Denison)

Michelle O'Byrne (Bass)

Harry Quick (Franklin)

Sid Sidebottom (Braddon)

Victoria

Fran Bailey (McEwen)

Anna Burke (Chisholm)

Simon Crean (Hotham)

Michael Danby (Melbourne Ports)

Gareth Evans (Holt)

Martin Ferguson (Batman)

John Forrest (Mallee)

Steve Gibbons (Bendigo)

Julia Gillard (Lalor)

Alan Griffin (Bruce)

Harry Jenkins (Scullin)

Louis Lieberman (Indi)

Jenny Macklin (Jagajaga)

Peter Nugent (Aston)

Gavan O'Connor (Corio)

Neil O'Keefe (Burke)

Nicola Roxon (Gellibrand)

Bob Sercombe (Maribymong)

Sharman Stone (Murray)

Lindsay Tanner (Melbourne)

Andrew Theophanous (Calwell)

Kelvin Thomson (Wills)

Greg Wilton (Isaacs)

Michael Wooldridge (Casey)

Christian Zahra (McMillan)

Western Australia

Kim Beazley (Brand)

Graham Edwards (Cowan)

Carmen Lawrence (Fremantle)

Jann McFarlane (Stirling)

Stephen Smith (Perth)

In the debate in the Senate on racism and the need for a Code of Ethics, held on 9th May 1996, the following comments were made:

Senator Reynolds (Labor, Queensland):

Australia has always valued its diversity. We have always been proud of the nature of our multicultural society...As parliamentarians, we have an obligation to make sure that what we say is correct in terms of the facts... what we say in interviews and what we say at meetings and in speeches to various groups ultimately affects the way certain extremists in our society respond to the issue of racial harmony.

Senator Short (Liberal, Victoria— Assistant Treasurer):

... we on this side of the chamber— the coalition ... come from that basic principle of total abhorrence of any form of racism.

... parliamentarians ... are elected to represent all of their constituents and ... it is totally reprehensible for any parliamentarian to announce that they will refuse to represent a particular group. Certainly I think all politicians and parliamentarians are elected to represent all the people.

Senator Spindler (Australian Democrats, Victoria):

We should be conscious of ... the responsibility that we as parliamentarians have, individually and collectively. Whether we like it or not, it is a fact that we contribute to the shaping of public opinion.

Senator Abetz (Liberal, Tasmania):

... we, as members of the national parliament, have a responsibility to ensure there is community harmony between the different races in Australia.

Senator Barney Cooney (Labor, Victoria):

The issue of racism is vital in a country like ours. The tag of racist is a horrible one because in a multicultural society racism strikes at the heart of the community.

And in the Senate debate on the Native Title Amendment Bill 1997 (No. 2), held on 6th July 1998:

Senator John Woodley (Australian Democrats, Queensland):

[signing] the code of race ethics, which Senator Margaret Reynolds has proposed... would certainly do much to take away the threat of a race-based election.

Signatories to the *Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics*

Senate

Australian Capital Territory

Kate Lundy

New South Wales

Vicki Bourne

George Campbell

John Faulkner

Michael Forshaw

Marise Payne

Sue West

Northern Territory

Trish Crossin

Queensland

Andrew Bartlett

Brenda Gibbs

John Hogg

Margaret Reynolds

John Woodley

South Australia

Nick Bolkus

Rosemary Crowley

Meg Lees

John Quirke

Chris Schacht

Natasha Stott Despoja

Tasmania

Bob Brown

Kay Denman

Brian Harradine

Susan Mackay

Shayne Murphy

Kerry O'Brien

Nick Sherry

Victoria

Lyn Allison

Kim Carr

Jacinta Collins

Stephen Conroy

Barney Cooney

Karen Synon

Western Australia

Mark Bishop

Peter Cook

Chris Evans

Dee Margetts

Jim McKiernan

Andrew Murray

Senators Elect

Aden Ridgeway (New South Wales)

Joe Ludwig (Queensland)

Jan McLucas (Queensland)

Brian Greig (Western Australia)

On 2nd December 1996 in the Main Committee Room, Parliament House, Canberra, the *Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics* was presented to religious leaders and representatives of ethnic and community organisations:

Archbishop Mar T Aboodi
Syrian Orthodox Church

Archbishop Aghan Baliozian
President, National Council of Churches in Australia

Cardinal Edward Clancy
Chairman, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Commissioner John Clinch
Territorial Commander, [Southern] The Salvation Army

Patricia Firkin
Presiding Clerk, Religious Society of Friends

Archbishop Gibran
Primate, Antiochian Orthodox Church

The Revd David Gill
General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia

The Revd Djinyini Gondarra
National Chairperson, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

Commissioner John Gowans
Territorial Commander, [Eastern] The Salvation Army

Pastor Cecil Grant
Federal Aborigines Board, Churches of Christ

Mr Robert Leane
President, National Conference of Churches of Christ

Bishop Arthur Malcolm
Chairperson, National Aboriginal Anglican Council

Brother Graeme Mundine
Chairperson, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

The Revd Graham Paulson
National Coordinator, Aboriginal and Islander Baptist Council of Australia

The Revd Dr Gabriel Popescu
Romanian Orthodox Church

Archbishop Keith Rayner
Primate, Anglican Church of Australia

Archbishop Stylianos
Primate, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

Dr Jill Tabart
President, Uniting Church in Australia

The Revd Marcos Tawfik
Coptic Orthodox Church

Bishop Mar Meelis Zaia
Assyrian Church of the East

Bishop Browning
Canberra and Goulburn Anglican Diocese

Robert Tupper
Uniting Church

Chris Sidoti
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

Conflict Resolution Network
Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission
Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia

Federation of Chinese Community of Canberra
Czechoslovak Australian Association (Beseda)
Anti-Racism Campaign
Philippine Australian Association of the ACT
Fiji Australia Association Inc
ACT Philippines-Australia Community Association

Salvadorian Women's Group
Lao Community
Sakyamum Buddhist Centre
Afghan-Australia Council of the ACT
ACT Jewish Community
Australian-Sri Lanka Association
Colombian Australian Society of ACT
National Australian Chinese Assn Inc
Afghan Community
ACT Jewish Community
Russian Community
Council of Polish Organisations
Migrant Resource Centre of Canberra and Queanbeyan
Tongan Association of Canberra and Queanbeyan
Order of Australia Committee
Trades and Labour Council of the ACT
Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union

Fr Frank Brennan SJ, responded to the presentation on behalf of the religious and ethnic community leaders with the following:

I am honoured to respond to Senators Reynolds and Woodley on behalf of community leaders. As an ex-Queenslander I am delighted that this initiative has come from two Queensland senators where the problem first arose. While commending the substance of the *Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics*, I also commend the process by which this code has been formulated and presented.

First, this code results from a legitimate complaint by indigenous Australians in the wake of the brazen declaration by a member of this Parliament that she would not represent them or people of their race. Second, this code was drafted by members of the Parliament in consultation with community leaders. Third, this code is being presented by members of Parliament to community leaders. All three steps in the preparation of this code highlight that in contemporary Australia sovereignty is vested in the people and the sovereignty of any institution such as the national Parliament is derived from the people.

This voluntary code does not place any limitation on freedom of speech but rather is a democratic enhancement of its exercise.

It is no interference with parliamentary privilege but a responsible exercise of it.

It does not derogate from the representative obligation of members of Parliament; it is a fulfilment of that constitutional obligation.

All power in this Parliament is from the ballot box. The power and responsibility to govern come from us, the people. Nothing could be more calculated to undermine the legitimacy of this Parliament or the sovereignty of this nation than an unchallenged declaration by a member of this Parliament that citizens would be unrepresented, especially indigenous Australians.

I congratulate those members of Parliament who have subscribed to the code and urge all members to do so before 10 December, Human Rights Day 1996. On behalf of you, the community leaders gathered here in the Main Committee Room of the Parliament, I gratefully acknowledge the presentation of this code in the hope that politicians of all parties will act in a racially non-discriminatory manner which upholds the honour of public office and the Parliament for the good of the nation.

Frank Brennan, SJ, AO, Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre, PO Box 522, Kings Cross, NSW 2001

Further Support for the Code

The *Code of Race Ethics* has also received support from: Fred Chaney; the Community of Ursuline Nuns; Lt Commander Robert J. Kyle and the Australia-Indonesia Families Association; Margaret Helman & Associates; The Conflict Resolution Network; Lois O'Donoghue (former Chairperson of ATSIC), Dr Peter Wong, AM; the Jessie Street National Women's Library; Michael Dodson (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner); Sir Ronald Wilson; Dennis Altman (School of Politics, La Trobe University).

* * * * *

Former parliamentarians who endorsed the Code during the 38th Parliament include:

Senate

Belinda Neal (NSW)

House of Representatives

Steve Dargavel (Fraser, ACT)

Peter Andren (Calare, NSW)

Peter Baldwin (Sydney, NSW)

Bob Brown (Charlton, NSW)

Ted Grace (Fowler, NSW)

Peter Morris (Shortland, NSW)

Paul Zammit (Lowe, NSW)

Nick Dondas (Northern Territory)

John Bradford (McPherson, Qld)

Susan Jeanes (Kingston, SA)

Clyde Holding (Melbourne Ports, Vic)

Barry Jones (Lalor, Vic)

Ralph Willis (Gellibrand, Vic)

Ricky Johnston (Canning, WA)

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