**CERD Thematic Discussion  
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It is timely to have this forum on racial discrimination, given that there is a global resurgence of intolerance, xenophobia and racism. It is absolutely essential that people, societies, and states around the world show resolve in countering racism, in naming it whenever it appears, and in fighting it with every means possible.

This is for very simple reasons: racism runs contrary to our universal values of equality and non-discrimination, and racism diminishes not only those who are on the receiving end of prejudice and discrimination. It diminishes all of us, whether it is communities, societies, or the global community.

In the short time that I have I'd like to reflect on the Australian experience on racial discrimination, and touch on some issues we are currently dealing with, with respect to racial profiling, hate speech and racial violence, and educative means to combat racism.

But first, some background on Australia. Australia is a country that is proud of its diversity; we are a multicultural and multiracial society. Nearly 50 per cent of the Australian population is either born overseas or has a parent who was born overseas. I, myself, count among this category of Australians as someone who was born in France and has parents of Laos and Chinese background. But I am by no means atypical as a member of Australian society.

Along with Canada, Australia was one of the first countries to adopt an official policy of multiculturalism. And by multiculturalism, I mean the idea that the rights of citizenship include a right for all citizens and members of the society to express their cultural identity and heritage within the limits of the law. Or, to put it in more basic terms, multiculturalism is the idea that there is no one typical or authoritative way to be Australian; one can be Australian and be comfortable in your own skin, whatever colour or hue that may be.

There is robust and strong support for multiculturalism in Australia. Just overnight, the most authoritative survey of national surveys we have, the Scanlon Foundation study on social cohesion, found that 85 per cent of Australians believe that multiculturalism is good for the country. 85 per cent. Moreover, there is strong acceptance of immigration in Australia. In that same study, 63 per cent agree that accepting immigrants makes Australia stronger. If you were to compare such figures with public sentiment in other, similar liberal democratic countries with large migrant populations, you would struggle to find many who would show support of such kind.

Nonetheless, racism does persist and it persists in significant form in Australia. About 20 per cent of the Australian population have experienced racial or religious discrimination during the past 12 months. Those from non-English speaking backgrounds experience significantly higher levels of racism; 34 per cent in fact, in the last 12 months say they have experienced racism or religious discrimination if they come from a non-English speaking background.

And unfortunately, there are signs that racial intolerance and prejudice are on the rise. There has been a deterioration of public discourse in Australia on matters concerning race and immigration. There has been, if you like, a normalisation of bigotry and discrimination that is beginning to creep into the Australian civic culture.

This has been evident in the calls by politicians and media commentators on the imposition of a ban on Muslim immigration; there have been calls for the mass internment of Muslims as well. And, we have found in recent years that far-right political groups are enjoying regular and sympathetic platforms on mainstream media. Indeed, white nationalist organisations are operating with greater confidence and energy in public; they have been inspired by the so-called 'alt-right' in the United States, and by the success of xenophobic movements in Europe.

Racial profiling is one manifestation of prejudice's stubborn presence. There are a number of groups who would experience racial profiling in the most acute way in Australia. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While they make up only 3 per cent of the population in Australia, 27 per cent of prisoners in Australia are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in background. Muslim Australians and African background Australians also experience racial profiling, particularly in light - respectively - of public anxieties about terrorism, and in respect to contact with police and public officials.

More generally, those from migrant backgrounds may struggle in employment and in the labour market. There have been statistical studies which have shown that having, for example, a Chinese or Middle Eastern name equates to a disadvantage in being called back for an interview in searching for a job.

If I may turn to hate speech and free speech very quickly, as there has been a debate over the past four years in Australia concerning the Racial Discrimination Act, which is Australia's domestic implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. During the past four years, there have been two attempts to weaken these laws, attempts which have not succeeded. There has been extensive conflict and contest about the meaning of freedom. Very simply, no freedom is absolute. While there is freedom of speech, that should not involve a freedom to inflict bigotry onto others with impunity. Here, the law plays an important role in setting a standard for equality and racial tolerance.

Laws alone, however, are not enough. We also need educative measures against racism. We have, for example, a public awareness campaign called *Racism. It Stops with Me*, which we lead at the Australian Human Rights Commission.

But if I may conclude on some of the obstacles that we have confronted in engaging in education on race. One, there is a reluctance, sometimes, to deal with racism in part in Australia because we have an unresolved challenge of achieving reconciliation with Aboriginal people. Our multicultural success can also, at times, lead to some complacency. We celebrate cultural diversity, we celebrate food and festivals, but we do not necessarily have, at all times, racial literacy. We can adopt a 'colourblind' approach as opposed to an openness to having conversations about race.

And finally, I would say there is a challenge in ensuring people understand that racism comes in insidious and persistent forms. It is one thing to think of racism only in terms of a belief in racial superiority, or a doctrine of racial purity, but there are more benign forms of racism that exist. Racism is as much about impact as it is about intention, and as much about effect as it is about purpose, and sometimes this is the most difficult part of racism for people to understand.