

A reception to celebrate the 35th Anniversary of the founding of the Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc., Wednesday 19th March 2014

It is a privilege and a pleasure for me and my wife to welcome you all to this reception to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) and the valuable contribution that the Centre has made over those 35 years to settle migrants in our community and to promote justice, diversity and inclusion.

We know and understand the importance of the work done by the Migrant Resource Centre for both my wife and I arrived on this island with our families as immigrants seeking a new life, me in 1950 and my wife a little later. We were boat people, but unlike the unfortunate boat people of today we were welcomed to this country by the government of the day who paid the greater share of our boat fares from post war England. Although the Migrant Resource Centre did not exist then people were assigned, presumably by the Government, to greet and welcome all the migrants and to give them assistance and advice to help new families settle into what appeared to be different and a little scary new surroundings.

Of course, they were days quite different from today for the then government operated under a white Australia policy so the multiculturalism that we enjoy today did not exist and there is no doubt the country was all the poorer for it. There were no coffee shops, delicatessens, nor outdoor dining. There were neither music festivals nor other multicultural celebrations that are now part of everyday life in this country. Australia was a white mono-ethnic society and I say that advisedly, for to our shame, it was not until the Constitution was amended in 1967 that aborigines were properly recognised as part of the population of of Australia.

The last annual report of the Migrant Resource Centre is testimony to a proud record of important work carried out by a dedicated staff and many committed volunteers. It speaks of "the growing demand for services and ever increasing complexity of the service environment." It speaks of the campaign against racism, the need to look after an aging migrant population and many other projects that are in hand, so on this 35th birthday occasion there is much to celebrate and still much work to be done.

My wife and I congratulate the Board, Staff, clients, stakeholders and the all-important volunteers on the

immeasurable contribution that the Migrant Resource Centre has made to our community.

Every celebration needs a little music and tonight is no exception, but I will ask my wife to explain this to you as she is the musician and the Director of all things musical at Government House.

MU We frequently have music at our receptions. Music always sounds wonderful in this beautiful room with its fantastic acoustic and, of course, music creates an atmosphere of celebration and brings people together. I'm sure there is an abundance of music resources amongst the cultures represented at the Migrant Resource Centre and that is where we turned to for the music tonight. Tonight the Karen Choir that was formed in 2009 is going to sing for you. The Karen are an ethnic minority of Burma who fled their homeland due to civil unrest. They began arriving in Australia in 2006 through the humanitarian program. Although Burma, or Myanmar is a Buddhist country, the majority of refugees from Burma selected for resettlement in Australia are Christian. Most Karen who have settled in Tasmania are Baptist and hence the primary repertoire of their songs is of religious origin. There are around 150 Karen in the southern region of Tasmania many of whom arrived with little or no English.

This evening I acknowledge Moo Lay and members of the Choir for their song tonight.

Ladies and Gentlemen for just 10 minutes your attention please as we enjoy the music made by the Karen Choir.