

Dear distinguished guest,

I would like to thank Aunty Betty and begin my speech by **Acknowledging Thurubul (The Turrabul and Jagera) people in Brisbane, the traditional owner of the land we meet, I respect their elders both past and emerging.**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I greet you with the Islamic greeting of Assalamu Alayqum – Peace be upon you. Ramadan Mubarak to all of you.

On behalf of the Queensland Intercultural Society, it is my great honour to warmly welcome each and every one of you this evening to this wonderful 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace & Dialogue Iftar Dinner and QIS Award Ceremony.

**I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have participated in this event. Without your support and presence this dinner would have no significance.**

**I would like to thank our co-hosts from the two largest parties in Queensland Parliament and express my sincere appreciation the Hon Stirling Hinchliffe MP (ALP), Minister for Local Government, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs,**

**And my sincere appreciation Mr John-Paul Langbroek MP, (Liberal National Party), Shadow Minister for Sport and Racing and**

Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Shadow Minister for the Commonwealth Games

We appreciate the work they do for the state of Queensland and for partnering in this program.

I would also like to acknowledge our keynote speaker John Cleary, is a veteran ABC broadcaster and one of Australia's best-known commentators on religion. We're all looking forward to hearing his presentation shortly.

I am also acknowledging Distinguished Ministers and Members of State Parliament, Diplomatic Corps, Honorary Consul Generals, Members of Federal and State Police, Member of Media, Academia, Public Service, respected guests from Mosques, Churches, Synagogues and temples, Community & Multi-Faith Leaders, ladies and gentlemen

By co-hosting and supporting such a meaningful event at the Parliament of Queensland has become a catalyst and plays an instrumental role towards breaking barriers, stereotypes, bigotry and towards our shared goal of building the ideal cohesive, inclusive and harmonious society as well as promoting community harmony, dialogue and friendship.

For QIS, tonight is one of the most special dinners in the holy month of Ramadan. Tonight, it is a good reminder of how far we have come as an organisation. Our first Iftar Dinner was in 2007 and tonight is our 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Iftar dinner in Queensland Parliament.

This year in QIS, we are hosting many home Iftars and some institution Iftars during Ramadan and they are all interfaith & intercultural in nature. Here I'd like to sincerely thank the host families for extending their hospitality to us. **It is the hospitality of sharing a table together, but more profoundly it is hospitality of the heart and soul. I also would like to** thank our guests for accepting and participating at such a meaningful gathering. Coming together, sharing food around the table with people from various cultures and faiths enables both sides to know each other and see that most worries about each other stem from pointless and groundless ignorance. It is wonderful to see that the demand for home Iftars is increasing significantly every year, which contributes greatly to the social cohesion and multiculturalism of Australia.

Ramadan is a time for thanksgiving, devotion, spiritual nourishment and sharing - a time when we gather around a dinner table and share not only food but also share common values and friendship. The Muslim community opens its homes to the wider society in Ramadhan. To reciprocate, the people of QLD open their house, the parliament, to the diversely rich audience here tonight. This mutual

welcoming and acceptance goes a long way in showing our oneness in society.

As mentioned many times before, Multiculturalism is part of this nation's story. It's a contributing factor to its growth and identity. Australians like to travel abroad as we have interest about the world, we live in a genuine interest about how others live. We are somewhat bold enough to try to new dishes and partake in a cultural performance or activity which gets us out of our comfort zone. This willingness to be participate or be immersed in the other's experience goes a long way in how we treat people whether overseas or here.

Here in Australia we are encouraged to give it a go, have a dig. We also support the underdog in their attempt to rise beyond expectations. Why do we do this ? Is it because we as individuals have to continually strive to overcome the hurdles in front of us and silence the naysayers. Could it also be because we are appreciative of being far from major conflicts like in other parts of the world, and to keep it that way, it requires us to be vigilant and constantly active in upholding harmony. Even though we boast of social cohesion and the majority of us support diversity, there's still the issue of unconscious bias that effects everything from hiring in the workplace to socialising. To work on our biases, we must clearly engage more with the 'other' to breakdown stereotypes

Getting to know the ‘other’ and their differences is good. We should embrace difference and grow with it....only to realise that even though there are more commonalities than differences. It shouldn’t take a person like Mamoudou Gassama, a Malian immigrant in France who climbed several floors of balconies to save a child hanging off the balcony to recognise our oneness in humanity. His heroic act should not be the reason of his acceptance to society. He should not be on a list called the ‘good migrant’ and be given special provisions whereas others of his ilk are given unfavorable attention. This classification of minorities to good and bad groups doesn’t help when trying to eradicate racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The grouping of people into classes is a divisive threat that is existential and have the potential to tear down society and lead to serious conflict. If we have learned anything from the #MeToo movement, it’s that we need to listen to and trust people when they call out injustice.

I believe Australia could lead the way in challenging these structures that keep minorities feeling like they need to be superhuman just to reach the level of the average white male. I too am reflecting on how my gender and appearance gives me certain advantages in life and how I can use everything at my disposal to create change. It is our sincere call that everyone in the audience use their privileges to create change and accept the humanity in all of us irrespective of their gender, skin colour, age, profession or ability.

I also believe we should break the cycle of exclusion. We should stop using the stories of previous waves of migrants who worked hard and rose above their station and their exclusion. To say that those before you – the Irish, Italians, Greeks all faced what you're facing now...but they worked hard and are now accepted. This statement shows that racism is an unchanging reality that is always seeking out a new victim, while ignoring those who have been victimised in the past. For centuries, our Aboriginal and Torres Straight islanders had struggled for equality on their own lands. Their struggle is still ongoing. We ask new migrants to do the same as previous migrants, work hard and rise above the hatred. But what if they didn't have to be subjected to hatred? What if we challenged that system of hatred? What if we accepted people for who they are and assist where we can to advance their settlement in Australia. These are uncomfortable thoughts, but the holy month of Ramadan is a time for reflection and self-criticism and these are my reflections.

Once again I greet everyone with my deepest respects.

I wish peace and blessings of Ramadan be upon you all.