

Speech on the Parliament Reception for the Walk from Robe Project

25 May 2017

By the Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for that warm welcome. Can I begin my remarks by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my deep personal respects to the elders past and present, to Matthew Guy, to Robin Scott, ministerial parliamentary colleagues the presiding officers too numerous to list individually, but I'm sure they won't mind. It's not really a day for the politicians today. It's a day for some pretty remarkable people who have given us an opportunity to reflect with some considerable sorrow on a terrible injustice of the past. But they've also allowed us to be reminded, as if we really needed any, of the contribution that Chinese Victorians and Chinese Australians have made to our state and our nation over such a long period of time. Before I reflect a little more on that, can I of course acknowledge Zhao Jian, the Consul General of the People's Republic of China, June Anderson, Helen Kapolos, I think she's here as well.

There are many other distinguished guests both from different multicultural groups, but of course from so many Chinese Community Agencies, all of whom do an outstanding job making a profound contribution not just to continuing to celebrate and practice Chinese tradition and culture, but to pass that on to the next generation and to share it quite magnificently through so many different events. That's such an engaging and generous multicultural community and one that can be so very proud of the contribution that you have and continue to make. To all of you, it's my great pleasure to say 'Xia wu hao', good afternoon and welcome to your parliament.

We've just heard the history of a very shameful act, and it's hard to conceive today when we are, I think at the centre of welcome, we're at the centre of an inclusive Australian multiculturalism and I don't think any jurisdiction in our nation and perhaps in the world, is more respectful and inclusive, more encouraging of migration, more encouraging of the fact that, and more certain of the fact that our multiculturalism and our diversity is our greatest strength. It sets us apart. It makes us safer. It makes us more prosperous. It makes us stronger and more decent, a fairer Victorian because of our brilliant diversity.

That's why it's so very difficult to turn your mind back to the 1850s, and to think of a policy decision being taken with the express purpose of being anything but welcoming. It is a matter of record that many have worked to highlight this injustice over a long period of time, and that each person who has made sure this story was told and retold, that the shame and the injustice of that decision would not be forgotten. I think all of us are very proud of you, that dedication, that commitment is how we both celebrate all the things that are good in our history but never forget those things that we ought to be

sad about, that we ought to be concerned about. That duty, that hard work is often..doesn't often come with the thanks that it richly deserves.

So each of us here today, we are in your debt for all those kilometres that you've walked and more beyond that group of walkers, those people who have always been at the forefront of this movement, at this advocacy, at this poignant reminder of a chapter in our history that is not a particularly proud one. As I said earlier, does however give us an opportunity today though, not just to reflect with kind and with honesty on that sadness, but to also join together in a really joyous way to celebrate and honour the contribution that Chinese Victorians and Australians make in every walk of life, in every profession, with such a dedicated focus on hard work, on family, on making a contribution, on giving back, on not just celebrating cultural and heritage and tradition but sharing it, on being good citizens, the best of citizens. I don't think any other cultural community would mind me saying that I don't think anyone has made a bigger, some may have made an equal contribution, but I don't know that anybody has made a bigger contribution to the modern multiculturalism that we cherish and value so very much.

Now, today is the day to reflect with honesty, it is a day to be reminded of the profound and important contribution that the Chinese community makes in a modern Victoria and throughout the history of our state. But it is also an opportunity to do something really important.

It is never too late to say sorry, particularly if you mean it. And to, I know some of these walkers today are direct descendents of those who made that difficult, that terrible pilgrimage in a way, across to Victoria, forced to do that on foot. To those descendents, to every Chinese Victorian, to every person hurt by that terrible policy position, on behalf of the Victorian government, on behalf of the Victorian Parliament, I express our deepest sorrow and I say to you that we are profoundly sorry.

'Dui bu qi', sorry, but so very grateful today to be able to celebrate all of the Chinese community has given us and continues to give us. To everybody here today, you can be proud of what you've achieved, and I think you can be certain that this parliament, and that our state, our broader community will continue to value and respect the contribution that you continue to make. Thank you very much.