

2000: an overview

The year 2000 saw two significant events for the communities that make up multicultural New South Wales – The Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games 2000 and the enactment of the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill 2000*.

The Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games

A hallmark of the year 2000 was the outstanding success of the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games. This success was strongly connected to multiculturalism. As far back as the bid for the 2000 Games, it was recognized that Australia's commitment to multiculturalism, and the ethnic diversity of modern Australia, were significant assets. This contributed to the success of the bid in 1993. Subsequently, in the preparations for the Games a deliberate effort was made to reflect multiculturalism as far as possible in the range of programs, extending from workforce recruitment and training to public communications to the athletes family homestay program. Our capacity to welcome the world during the games was greatly enhanced by the existing connections of the community to countries around the world and affinity with their cultures and languages. The Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG)'s Multicultural Advisory Committee played a useful role in bringing this dimension into the Games planning. The Chair of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, Mr Kerkyasharian, was the ex-officio chair of this advisory committee. A specific area deserving special mention was the contribution of the volunteers, and other staff, able to meet the needs of the Australian public, foreign visitors, athletes, officials and various stakeholders.

The Ethnic Affairs Commission supported a wide range of activities related to the Games ranging from the opening ceremony, to ticketing and the wearing of language badges.

The Commission worked closely with local government authorities in different suburbs of Sydney to create events which showcased cultural diversity as a integral part of the city's social and cultural life.

The Commission organised, on behalf of the New South Wales Government, a series of nine *Street Festivals* designed to share the city's diversity with visitors from around the world.

With the assistance of grants from the Commission, the local government councils in Auburn, Canterbury, Fairfield, Kogarah, Leichhardt, Liverpool, Marrickville, Parramatta, Willoughby, Hornsby and Penrith took on the role of mounting and publicising the festivals at the local level.

The program of *Street Festivals* was launched by the Minister for Public Works and Services and the Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship, the Hon Morris Iemma, at the first festival, in Lakemba. The Chair of the Commission, Stepan Kerkyasharian, also spoke at the launch and gave opening addresses at several other festivals in the program.

Each festival provided excellent opportunities for cooperation between various ethnic communities, especially in suburbs where multicultural festivals had not previously been staged.

The Commission supported SOCOG's Samsung *Athletes' Family Host 2000* program, which was part of Sydney's original bid for the games. The Commission facilitated and assisted hosts to meet the cultural and linguistic requirements of guests. Families from culturally diverse backgrounds were encouraged to participate in the program by hosting people from their own background or same religious belief. Under this program, approximately 2,000 hosts were recruited and approximately 1,200 guests were welcomed.

The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games *Community Hospitality Project* was undertaken to provide an innovative way of harnessing Sydney's multicultural character, to showcase the city's cultural diversity and to assist in ensuring the 2000 Games were inclusive of the whole community and gave ethnic communities an opportunity to be involved in the broader experience of the 2000 Games. With the support of SOCOG and the Commission, a program manager based in SOCOG's Multicultural Affairs Program was appointed to co-ordinate and support a wide range of ethnic community activities which included the preparation of guides and organisation of receptions, functions, events and drop-in places for athlete teams and overseas visitors.

The Commission was involved in the preparation of 17 *Community Profiles* for the major ethnic communities, targeting visiting international media. These were jointly published with SOCOG and comprise information about the community's population size, major religious groups, history of migration to Australia, community structure, social and cultural life, sporting interests and local and media contacts.

Information and Technology

Rapid changes in information technology have created new opportunities for agencies to disseminate multilingual and/or targeted information to communities. New South Wales government agencies have been quick to move into this area. In the year 2000 there was increased reporting on the use of websites to communicate with ethnic communities. Communities in regional and rural areas are also benefiting from increased educational opportunities in the context of distance learning. An example is the provision of Adult Migrant English Program modules through distance learning, described in section 5 of this report.

Community views and participation

The Ethnic Affairs Commission organised a series of seminars in 2000 focussing on greater participation by culturally and linguistically diverse communities in a number of identified areas.

The *GST Seminar* took place in May 2000. It was designed to inform and advise ethnic community groups about the current requirements of the Goods and Services Tax legislation, with particular reference to the management of grants monies provided by the Ethnic Affairs Commission and other funding bodies.

The *Crime and Ethnicity Seminar* took place in June 2000. The seminar arose from statements made by the Attorney General, the Hon Jeff Shaw, about the importance of understanding the links between crime and ethnicity and the importance of data collection in establishing the true nature of these links. Prior to the seminar, papers by experts were commissioned addressing issues concerning how ethnicity should be collected and used. There were over 70 seminar participants from community organisations, tertiary institutions, government departments, and the NSW Police Service. Seminar participants considered what data should be collected; how data should be collected; the release and use of data; and the importance of how data is used and interpreted and considered draft resolutions on these issue areas.

The *Australian Honours System Seminar* was held in July 2000 at Governor Macquarie Tower. It was organised to inform ethnic community members about the nomination process of the Australian Honours System. The seminar was attended by Ms Amanda O'Rourke, Director of Australian Honours Secretariat and Mr Paul O'Neill, Assistant Secretary of Awards and National Symbols. Some 60 participants from ethnic communities were present at the seminar and asked wide-ranging and detailed questions.

Building the Reconciliation Bridge was held in October 2000 and attended by more than fifty community leaders. A collection of position papers was prepared and published for the seminar in October 2000 to provide direction to the discussion about the involvement of non-indigenous ethnic communities in the reconciliation process. Following discussion at the seminar, it was agreed that many indigenous Australians and many immigrants shared experiences of dispossession, marginalisation, racism, political persecution, loss of identity and minority status. The seminar participants and panelists discussed strategies to bring non-indigenous ethnic communities into the reconciliation debate. The panelists were: Ms Zita Antonios, former Human Rights Commissioner, Mr John-Claire Lee, Chair of the Chinese Forum, Ms Nicola Joseph of Radio Skid Row and Ms Cathy Malera Bandjalar, Editor, Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal.

The Arts

Among the many exciting initiatives in the arts in the year 2000 were those involving the Vietnamese community. As described in section 5 of this report, the first national cultural conference, *Being Part of the Landscape – Celebrating 25 Years of Vietnamese Australians*, was held in November 2000. The first Australian Vietnamese play was produced also, entitled: *It is too late*.

Arrangements for the establishment of the *NSW Premier's Translation Prize* were finalised between the Ethnic Affairs Commission, Ministry for the Arts and PEN (a significant international writers association), in July 2000. PEN Sydney Centre conceived this prize which is intended to support and promote the work of literary translators. The award will consist of \$5000, as well as a medallion inscribed *PEN Translations Medallion*. Advertisements were placed in the press in August 2000 for the first round of applicants.

Community Relations

A number of projects in the year 2000 involved people from diverse backgrounds working together to improve the environment they share, such as by creating gardens, as described in Section 5 of this report. Other projects focussed on fostering social harmony in relation to particular issues.

Following highly publicised incidents involving young people and police in Lakemba and Punchbowl in November 1998, the NSW Premier established a working group to examine issues facing young people in the Canterbury-Bankstown Local Government Areas. The working group, consisting of area branch managers of various government departments, developed the *NSW Government Action Plan on Youth*. The Plan identified, among other things, the need to establish an After School Youth Service in Bankstown City Business District. The Bankstown After School Youth Service is a partnership between Bankstown City Council, Bankstown Police Community Youth Club and Bankstown Multicultural Youth Service. It is jointly funded by the Department of Community Services (for 3 years) and the Ethnic Affairs Commission (for the first year). The project (provisionally called Youth Café) aims to provide a meeting place for young people in the area and to connect these young people to services and educational opportunities. The project is expected to be launched in March 2001.

Overseas qualifications: doctors

As was reported in the 1999 *Ethnic Affairs Report*, considerable work on the part of a number of NSW government agencies had been done on the issue of obtaining local registration for overseas trained doctors. A report was prepared by a review committee headed by the Chair of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, and submitted to NSW Health.

It is a matter of continuing concern to the Commission that this report, entitled *The Race to Qualify*, has not yet been released by NSW Health, even though it was tabled in the New South Wales Legislative Council by an Opposition Member of the Council.

Community Relations Commission for a multicultural New South Wales

The new *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill 2000*, which replaces the Ethnic Affairs Commission with a *Community Relations Commission for a multicultural New South Wales*, was passed in the Upper House of the NSW Parliament on 11 October 2000. The new legislation sets up a number of firsts for Australia including: a broad definition of citizenship that embraces the diverse nature of our society, united by a commitment to Australia and shifting the focus of multicultural policy towards strengthening relations between all parts of the community regardless of background.

The future role of the Commission in practical terms will be worked through at a major forum on community relations planned for March 2001. The Forum will be an opportunity for key community organisations and individuals from rural, regional and metropolitan New South Wales to express their views. Forum members will identify key issues for the Commission's future agenda and identify projects to be carried out in partnership by the communities and the Commission. It is expected that the Forum will issue recommendations to be presented to the Community Relations Commission and government.

The NSW Premier will recommend to the NSW Governor that the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill 2000* be proclaimed to commence on 13th March 2001. The Inaugural Meeting of the Community Relations Commission has been planned to coincide with the Forum.