

African Community 2020 Summit

Communiqué



Introduction

On Thursday 17th April 2008, Lindsay Tanner and members of the Melbourne African community held a summit.

The African Community 2020 Summit addressed a range of economic and social issues of importance to the African community.

This communiqué captures the ideas and sentiments expressed by African community leaders. It is aimed to act as a channel for discussion for delegates to the Australia 2020 Summit.

Session 1: Social Inclusion

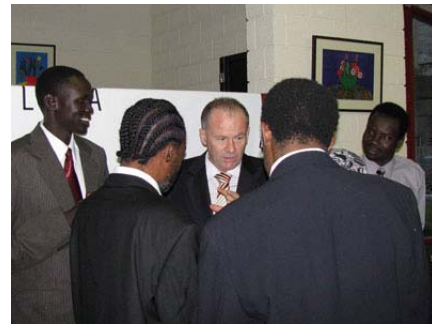
Families

There is a strong need for an increase in family reunion spots for the immigration intake.

The restrictions on immigration, due to the reduction in African immigration under the Howard government, have made life very difficult for many African migrants. Preventing families from being together creates much hardship – it is emotionally distressing for many families to be separated for long periods of time. The Citizenship test is also a barrier to entry into Australia because it acts as a deterrent for people in Africa to migrate to Australia, and it is also perceived as discriminatory against African migrants.

Child protection services need to work with the African community.

Although, like any part of Australian society, there are some children who need protection, child services is not always acting in a helpful way. In some families there is a breakdown of family authority and parents are finding it difficult to control their children. Many families feel that sometimes the children are manipulating the child protection system to remove power from their parents.



Community Relations

There is a strong need for an education campaign against racism.

Racism can take many forms. There is discrimination in the workplace, and employers are preying on the vulnerability of new African migrants because they understand how reliant they are on keeping their job. The media is also at fault in the way it portrays the African community as a source of crime and problems, whilst ignoring the numerous beneficial contributions the African community makes to Australian society. The wider community needs to be aware that African migrants want to be involved in Australian society – they just need to be given the opportunity.



Welfare groups and service providers need to respond to the unique needs of African immigrants.

Counsellors are not culturally sensitive and don't take into account the way in which African families operate when dealing with members of the African community. This reduces the effectiveness of these services and impairs their ability to assist the African community.

Community Facilities

There is a lack of facilities available to the African community where they can socialise, network and engage with the community.

For any community, a place to come together, meet other people and feel supported is important – but this is particularly crucial for new migrant populations. Sometimes the problem is a lack of facilities, but there is also a barrier to African communities finding out about and accessing the currently available facilities. The cost of hiring council facilities is often prohibitive so alternatives need to be provided.

Issues for Young People

The Victoria Police should train members of the African community to participate in law enforcement.

Although many problems with “gangs” of young people are exaggerated in the media, there is a problem with young people grouping together in public places, like train stations, which can be an unsafe place for them to hang out. The Police would benefit from having members of the African community among their force who would be culturally sensitive when dealing with young people and the African community.

Early intervention in the African Community should be seen as a long term investment.

Early intervention is needed to prevent problems with crime and drugs in the long term. Programs should be set up in schools to assist young African migrants to transition, before they run into trouble.

Settlement

Pre arrival orientation services should be provided.

Living in Australia is vastly different from many of the societies African migrants are coming from. Orientation services prior to arrival in Australia would help to ease the transition.

There is a lack of housing for larger families.

Many African families are having troubles – in both the private and public sector – in finding housing large enough to accommodate their families. The supply of housing appropriate for large families needs to be increased.



Session 2: Economic Issues

Employment and Pathways to Employment



More assistance is needed to help new African migrants find work.

The Job Network is not helping enough and more support is needed. There are unique barriers to employment facing the African community and extra assistance is necessary. Women in particular are finding it more difficult than men to gain employment.

Education

Young people need assistance in their transition to the Australian education system.

The reality is that some young African migrants have never been to school before, while for others, the school experience in Africa has been interrupted. It is important to have some pre-school training to help them transition to mainstream schools in Australia.

Age restrictions on education need to be more flexible.

In Africa, the class allocation (ie. Year level) is based on ability and not age. Because of the restrictive age requirements in the Australian year level system, young African migrants are sometimes placed in an inappropriate year level because it is based on their age and not their previous learning. Transition into Australian schools could be easier if these age restrictions were more flexible.

More scholarships are needed to help Africans attend university.

HECS debts are a significant deterrent to young Africans entering university. More scholarships would help to combat this.



English Language Skills

English language classes need to be more accessible.

There is not enough English language training available, it is inconstant and often is in locations that are hard to reach. English language classes are crucial in ensuring the successful transition of new migrants into Australian society, but the government is not providing enough services on this front.

Recognition of Qualifications

Qualifications of African migrants need recognition.

Resume discrimination is a significant barrier to employment for new African migrants. Training undertaken at African universities is largely not recognised and professional qualifications are not acknowledged. There are also problems with recognising the education undertaken by African migrants in Australia – even after completing study at an Australian institution; difficulty in finding work is a common experience.