

Time to talk frankly on immigration

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Last week *The Australian* [editorialised on Australia's immigration policies](#), noting that the Prime Minister's "reception this week at an invitation-only UN summit on refugees must have come as a surprise" to our refugee activists, whose bleatings figure so largely on the Green's ABC and elsewhere. Yes, indeed.

For myself, however, the surprise came not in that reception of Malcolm Turnbull's remarks, but at the full-throated manner in which he had voiced them. After all, it is not so long since, speaking way outside his then communications portfolio, he was expressing concerns about those same policies, then being unequivocally pursued by the Abbott government of which he was a cabinet minister. So much, at that time, for the doctrine of cabinet responsibility – another policy to which Mr Turnbull has now become (when it suits him) a staunch adherent.

That said, let me not be misunderstood. After all, as St Luke said, there is more joy "in heaven over one sinner that repenteth ... than over ninety and nine just persons." So the Prime Minister's apparent repentance is clearly to be welcomed – reminiscent though it may be of another PM (Kevin Rudd), who on assuming office is reported to have set up a focus group to see what he should believe in.

As the editorial noted, “the Prime Minister likes to hail Australia as the most successful multicultural nation”. He is far from singular in doing so; yet, that notwithstanding, that often-made claim is mired in confusion. There is no such thing in the world today as a “successful multicultural nation”, for the simple reason that cultural separatism (the policy first introduced by the late Al Grassby when minister for immigration in the Whitlam government, and pursued ever since by governments of all persuasions) works to produce divided nations, not united ones.

True, Australia’s culturally separatist policies have been less divisive than in most other instances, because our deeply ingrained national traditions of neighborliness and egalitarianism have worked to diminish their worst aspects. So if Mr Turnbull had hailed Australia as “the least unsuccessful multicultural nation” he may well have been right, as indeed he may well have been had he claimed that we are the most successful multi-ethnic (as distinct from multicultural) nation.

If our immigration policies are to be sustained into the future, it will be vital that they be discussed in much more precise language than (usually) hitherto. In short, “ethnicity” is not the same as “race”; “race” is not the same as “culture”; and “culture” is not the same as “ethnicity”.

When, therefore, Ministers (or journalists) insist that our immigration policy must be racially non-discriminatory – which it should be – that is not the same as saying that we should not discriminate between would-be immigrants on grounds of ethnicity or, in particular, culture. On the contrary, the growing threat from the more extreme adherents to Islam make it essential that, recognising these distinctions, we face up to the task of positively discriminating *against* such people. The fact that Senator Hanson has advocated something similar does not render it wrong to say so, and more importantly, do so.

As one of Australia’s greatest High Court Chief Justices, the late Sir Harry Gibbs, once said to The Samuel Griffith Society, “a state is entitled to prevent the immigration of persons whose culture is such that they are unlikely readily to integrate into society, or at least to ensure that persons of that kind do not enter the country in such numbers that they will be likely to form a distinct and alien section of society.” Note also that Sir Harry’s wise words would not confine a policy of anti-Islamic immigration merely to those Muslims who, on investigation, turn out to hold extreme Islamic views. The truth (demonstrated not only in Australia, but everywhere else where Muslim communities have been allowed to infiltrate Western societies in significant numbers) is that Muslims more generally are “persons whose culture is such that they are unlikely readily to integrate into society”. So while Hanson’s proposed total ban on Muslim immigration may go a shade too far, she is essentially correct in calling for such a ban to be widespread.

Indeed, her proposal really applies more widely. It should extend to people coming from all violence-prone cultures – think Somalia, Sudan and numerous war-torn West African nations – the kind of people now making Melbourne’s streets so dangerous. But that is a matter for another day.