

**WE'RE FAMILY TOO LAUNCH**

**NSW PARLIAMENT HOUSE**

**TUESDAY 10 APRIL 2012**

**SPEECH NOTES FOR ACON CEO NICOLAS PARKHILL**

- Thank you Helen.
- I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and pay my respects to their elders both past and present.
- For the last few years, ACON has been running a community art project and social justice campaign called This Is Oz.
- Essentially it's an online gallery featuring images of people from all walks of life with messages that celebrate social and cultural diversity, and that support the human rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.
- We've even got a photo booth here today if you would like to take part.
- The tagline for the campaign is 'Speak up for an inclusive Australia'.
- We can all be grateful that every day, more and more Australians are heeding this call and speaking up for a society that accepts GLBT people and respects their rights.
- The report we're launching today is acknowledging voices from the Arab community in that conversation.
- It's well established that the provision of human rights impacts directly on a person's health and wellbeing.

- For many people, the experience of discrimination, social exclusion and violence leads to a range of negative health concerns.
- It also limits their access to services, opportunities, social networks and creates an environment which affects their ability to make good choices about their wellbeing.
- The effects of racial discrimination are well documented and many people here today will have direct - or indirect - experiences of the impact of race-related prejudice.
- In terms of homophobia, research shows that 85% of GLBT people have experienced abuse, harassment or assault as a result of their sexuality or gender identity.
- In fact, gay men and lesbians are up to 6 times more likely than the general population to be assaulted.
- It should come as no surprise then that research also shows that in comparison to the general population, GLBT people experience much higher rates of mental health issues and drug and alcohol use.
- And tragically, suicide rates among GLBT people – especially young GLBT people – are also much higher.
- However, the effects of homophobia go beyond GLBT people.
- The disputes that GLBT people can have with family members – based solely on issues of sexuality and gender identity – can tear families apart, and leave rifts between loved ones that sometimes never heal.
- This creates another level of mental health concerns which the further impact on families and communities.

- This is the heartbreaking reality of homophobia – and the effects are present across all levels of Australian society and in all communities.
- *We're Family Too* is a ground-breaking piece of research that attempts to paint the first ever detailed picture about homophobia in Arabic-speaking communities in NSW.
- The report also reveals that within the GLBT community, many people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds experience racism and ethnic stereotyping, and are frustrated by what they perceive as an undue emphasis on sex, drugs and body image.
- For the first time, we now have a document that gives voice to these issues and the impact this discrimination is having.
- Having this information will allow us to be more effective in advocating for programs and services to address these issues.
- We now look forward to working with government agencies as well as individuals and organisations from both the Arab and GLBT communities to identify opportunities for programs and services, which increase respect for diversity in our communities and improve the health and safety of GLBT people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds.
- ACON is proud to be involved in the production of this report, and on behalf of our Board, staff, volunteers and supporters, I would like to thank all the respondents and contributors for helping shine a light on what are complex and emotive issues for both the Arab and GLBT communities.
- In particular I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the report's author Ghassan Kassisieh (cass-ah-SEE-ah) as well as other members of the report's steering committee.

- Also, the contribution and support of the Arab Council of Australia has been remarkable and I especially thank the Council's CEO Randa Kattan for her support.
- I would also like to pay tribute to the resilience of GLBT people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds who - in answer to negative experiences in both the Arab and GLBT communities - have created and fostered their own networks where they can acknowledge and celebrate their identities.
- By being open, understanding and supportive, we can all play a vital part in helping improve the health and wellbeing of people in our community.
- Thank you all for coming today and lending your support to this cause, especially The Hon. John Ajaka, The Hon. Helen Westwood, The Hon. Catherine Branson and the Chair and board members of the Arab Council of Australia.
- By speaking up, you're helping make our community a place that is inclusive for all Australians.

**ENDS**