



IEU STATEMENT ON ANTI-RACISM

1. The Independent Education Union of Australia strongly rejects and condemns the extremist views which have been advanced recently in the national parliament, other public forums and the media about issues of race, immigration and multiculturalism. Much of this national debate has been characterised by an ignorance of the facts of Australia's history in terms of relations with indigenous Australians and with those from other countries who have settled in Australia.
2. The IEU accepts that debate about the nature and values of Australian society is an intrinsic dimension of social and political life; however, the IEU believes that the tone and substance of the more extreme comments recently made represent ignorant and vindictive attacks upon various groups within our society and should be repudiated. The union deplores the acts of intimidation and expressions of hatred towards many groups and individuals that have intensified because of those developments. In particular the union is concerned at the school based manifestations of these problems.
3. The IEU believes that inadequate social and political leadership around these issues is harmful to the development of an inclusive community which is sensitive to the needs and values of different groups and appreciative of their similarities and differences.
4. The IEU notes that the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) was the first piece of anti-discrimination legislation passed by the Commonwealth Parliament, with further amendments to the RDA being effected by the Racial Hatred Act 1995. This legislation has been supplemented by the enactment of comprehensive anti discrimination legislation by all states and territories.
5. The central proscription in Section 9 of the RDA makes unlawful "any act involving a distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin" which nullifies the enjoyment of fundamental rights or freedoms. It deals specifically with racial discrimination in relation to access to places and facilities; the provision of goods and services; employment; and the right to join trade unions.
6. The 1995 amendments to the RDA make unlawful public acts which are reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate a person or group of people, where

the act is done because of the race, colour or national or ethnic origin of the person or group.

7. The IEU believes this legislative framework is fundamental for the development of a tolerant, decent, fair and democratic society, and together with other anti discrimination legislation should comprise part of the core curriculum of Civics Education in Australia's schools. To that end, high quality curriculum and resource materials, free of institutionalised racist attitudes must be identified and/or developed.
8. The IEU notes and supports the bi partisan statement by the Australian Government and Opposition of 30 October 1996. This statement:
 - Reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect regardless of race, colour, creed or origin;
 - Reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, creed or origin;
 - Reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage;
 - Reaffirms its commitment to maintaining Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an over-riding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values;
 - Denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.
9. The IEU believes that the multicultural nature of Australia arises from a hard fought history and is an impressive feature of recent decades. All Australians have a responsibility to debate relevant policy questions in a fashion which does not jeopardise the potentially fragile nature of a social cohesion.
10. The IEU believes that school systems, schools, teachers and support staff have a vital leadership role and obligation to practice and promote the ideal of racial equality and to develop and implement anti racist education and sanctions against racial discrimination, prejudice and harassment when they occur in the school community.
11. The IEU believes that schools play an important role in the construction, critique and transmission of social values. Fundamental to that process is the opportunity to develop a knowledge and understanding of the history of Australia and to study and appreciate the customs and traditions of various cultures and the contributions these have made to Australia's society. Fundamental to the integrity of these processes is the study of the complexity of Australian history, recognition of the full diversity of peoples and their particular histories have made up the totality of Australian society together with the development of skills in students to constructively deal with an Australian society produced by this history.
12. The IEU rejects the recurrent pronouncements by state and federal politicians of all political persuasions which deny or falsely minimise the history of conflict, dispossession and resistance in the relations between the indigenous peoples of

Australia and the peoples which progressively arrived from 1788 onwards. The law of Australia as set out in the High Court's Mabo decision recognises this history. Political suppression of this history from school syllabuses is rejected by the union.

13. The IEU believes that school authorities should demonstrate their commitment to ensuring a system and whole school approach to combating racism by providing cross cultural professional development to heighten the awareness and sensitivity of teachers, support staff and administrators to the needs of children with different cultural backgrounds.