

Advancing Australia's National Anti Racism F+E Con 2024 Video Framework.m4a

[00:00:00] Welcome back to the final session of the day. We are bringing the conference home with a powerful final couple of hours. Find your seats, get comfortable because we're all the way through to the end. Isn't it nice to be back together again, united in one room after our breakout sessions? I hope you had a fantastic day with your breakout sessions. The session we have now is titled 'Advancing Australia's National Anti-Racism Framework'. In partnership with stakeholders, the Australian Human Rights Commission is creating a national anti-racism framework to guide efforts more effectively across public, private and community sectors. And moderating this discussion, it gives me great pleasure to introduce you to Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner, Giri Sivaraman. Please make him very welcome. Giri Sivaraman. Thanks very much.

[00:01:02] I might start here, but then I'm going to sit with my panellists. So thank you all for being here today. Wonderful to see such an amazing crowd and it's been an incredible event. I just want to do a shout out to the Australian Human Rights Commission and the various people that have been involved in the organising. Something like this doesn't come together easily and they've just done an incredible job putting this on. So, round of applause for the commissioner! My name is Giri Sivaraman, or Giri Dharan Sivaraman; Giri Dharan only became a thing when I became the Commissioner. Until that point, only one random cousin used to call me that. But anyway, I thought I'd embrace my whole self when I became the Race Discrimination Commissioner because that is one of my things. And of course, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet, the Gadigal people, and pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are here today. And acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and this always been, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

[00:02:07] It's a great time to have this discussion. It's like Charles Dickens said, 'We live in the best of times; we live in the worst of times.' We're in a febrile time – there's no doubt about it. Social cohesion is low, but you don't get to social cohesion without first dealing with racism. And it is incredibly difficult to even talk about racism, let alone actually confront it. And what we seem to see in our society is that whenever there are ruptures or significant moments, racism streams out of those ruptures and sometimes it's almost overwhelming. And we've seen that in very recent times. At the start of the COVID epidemic, there was huge anti-Asian racism during the voice referendum, and even since then, there's been huge racism. Racism against First Nations people.

[00:02:57] And now, since the Israel-Palestine conflict, there's been an increase in anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian racism. The question that I have is: If racism can so quickly disperse through those ruptures, are there systemic or foundational problems within our society that allowed that to happen? And why is it so hard to talk about racism? I wrote an op-ed very recently where I said that the person who calls out racism often gets attacked far more than the actual racism itself. And what do you know? I actually got attacked for that op-ed straight after, so kind of case in point. We have an incredibly impressive panel and I'm going to introduce them

one by one. I'm hoping they'll sort of make a run onto the stage and with a fist up. So, I'll start with Professor Noreen Young. Noreen, round of applause.

[00:03:50] Noreen is a First Nation. Go to the next one. I'll sit here. Okay, yeah. Thanks. Sorry. Sorry. Noreen is a First Nations employment and employment diversity leader. She's the Associate Dean Indigenous Leadership and Engagement at UTS. And she's a kick-ass unionist. I know that from decades gone by because I often think that class and race, and the intersection between two, is forgotten, right? But here we go. Noreen can tell us about it. Next up, I'd like to ask Alan Wu to come up. Alan, are you there? Alan is a racial justice expert, a board member, a lawyer, and a community power builder. I love that. It's all about community when you're fighting to combat racism. Next up, she's been on panels before. I'm so glad that she's on this one here. Sisonke Misimang. Sisonke. I wanted a Winnie Mandela kind of walk-up, you know, that's it, that's it. I say that because she's actually written a biography about Winnie Mandela. Sisonke is an anti-racism and women's right advocate, a writer, a commentator, a published author, a regular Guardian columnist, and maybe most importantly for today, a storyteller. And we're going to hear some of those stories. Next up, Benny Boll. Come on down.

[00:05:17] Benny is, well, firstly, he's going to be the tallest person on this panel, but more importantly, Benny is a dear, dear close friend of mine. He's from Queensland. I've stacked this panel with Queenslanders today because that's where I come from. Queenslanders. Benny is a refugee and migrant advocate. He's a president of the Queensland African Communities Coalition. He holds two master's degrees. And I think most significantly for me, his name is on the National Monument to Migration here in Sydney. How do I get my name on the monument? Next up, I'd like to ask Associate Professor John Jeff Levy to come up. Thanks, Jeff. Jeff is a political theorist at UNSW. He actually established and directed the UNSW program in Jewish studies. He's a prominent contributor to Australian and international debates on multiculturalism and minority rights. And we're really glad that you're here with us today. Thanks very much, Jeff. And finally, certainly not least, Nora Ahmad. Nora, please. Thank you. Let's come up

[00:06:29] another Queensland. I told you I'd stack the panel. Nora is an expert community developer and a sociologist. She's an adjunct research fellow at Griffith University, and she's also the current executive director at the Islamophobia Register. Thank you so much for being here as well, Nora. So now I'm going to join the crew and hopefully you can still hear me. Yes, you can. That's good. And I thought I would start with Noreen. I really think it's important to start with the First Nations perspective. Any work that we do against racism has to be centred around First Nations. First Nations first. First Nations first. I'm with you there. But Noreen, you've been a strong and successful advocate about racism against First Nations people in employment in particular. I know that's been a great area of focus.

[00:07:18] So I really want you to tell us: What are the systemic racism factors? Barriers in employment against First Nations people? What do you think are the most significant issues? Thanks, Giri. I'd like to firstly acknowledge country as well, and acknowledge that we're on the land of the Gadigal, who I'm descended from, the Gadigal clan of the Sydney Basin. And I'd like to acknowledge elders past and present, and our ancestors – Hylil, who walk with us and Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islanders. And all Torres Strait Islander people today. And I can see one just in front of me who I'm very glad is here. So I'd like to do that first. Racism, racism, and racism. So we actually don't have any data on the levels of racism experienced by First Nations job seekers.

[00:08:12] In all the talk about First Nations people and employment, we've never asked why. We're not getting that. We're not getting the jobs that we want. We know that racism within workplaces is really problematic. We did a survey at Jumbunna, where I work. I still hold a substantive position as Professor of Indigenous Policy, Workforce Diversity, Indigenous Workforce Diversity at the Jumbunna Indigenous Institute. We did a survey four years ago, and we're about to do it again, called 'Garyella', 'Speak the Truth' in Wiradjuri. And thanks to the Elders for letting us use that language. And that indicated incredibly high levels of racism that Indigenous people encounter at work. So, that's the first two levels. And we have data. But then there's the bias around, so there's recruitment, there's retention, and then there's promotion.

[00:09:15] So, what we found is that the only place I've ever been able to measure where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in the workforce is a few years ago, I was asked by the New South Wales Public Service Commission to do a benchmarking exercise for them around where people were, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were across the nation. And of course, we couldn't do that benchmarking exercise because nobody would give us their data. But we did some work, and we were able to... you know it's like that, right? So I know that the APS has targets, have introduced targets now. But racism, racism, and racism at every level, I think the thing about the Garyella survey to me typifies what the racism looks like around our people and work.

[00:10:10] Because in all the talk, every election time, Tony Abbott specialised in it about bludgeoning blacks. And Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not working, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Nobody had ever thought to ask us what our experiences might be in the workplace. Garyella is the first time that that was done. And I've talked to you about some of what the survey of Aboriginal people led by - the survey was led by Aboriginal people in Indigenous research methodology, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. So that was the short answer. Gary, racism, racism, and racism. Yeah. Thanks. And on that issue of data and racial literacy and collection of data, that's something we'll come back to because that is one of the things that we're focusing on in the National Anti-Racism Framework.

[00:11:05] But one of the issues that I'm also interested in, and I might throw to Alan on this, is and all of us experience this in different ways. And people on this panel and people out there, it's that intersectionality when you have a number of different attributes. Now, Alan, you have possessed one attribute that nobody else on this panel has. You're young. Sorry, no disrespect to the rest of the panel there. Sorry, I just landed myself in that. We're wise. You're young. No, no, that's fine. But you're a young Australian. You're a young Australian of Asian origin. You're a member of the LGBTIQ+ community. And, of course, that intersection of race and other attributes - I don't attribute it as a formal term, but those other parts of you affect you, and they affect the communities you work with.

[00:11:59] And I just thought maybe you could tell us a little bit about how that intersectionality

operates in the communities you work with. Thanks, Gary. Yeah. And can I also begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. You know, I'm on the board of the Victorian Pride Centre, so this is a live issue for us. And I'm reminded of the situation last year, whereas queer organisations, along with all Australians, we had to consider our role in engaging our communities on the recent referendum. And, you know, this is how I think of it. The queer community, more than many others, knows the power of a yes vote.

[00:12:39] And the same-sex marriage survey results turned out to be momentous and affirmative. But as a gay person of colour, what will stick with me was the realisation that support for marriage equality was really softest in migrant communities, communities that do often vote for progressive policies. And, you know, that configuration is obscured by the final result. But that sense of betrayal of one of my communities by another is on paper and in the numbers forever. And I think, for me, there's something really brutal about that, those numbers. And I think, for me, there is something really brutal about that. Because it's a suspicion that some of your fellow Australians do not wish for you the same opportunities in future. And it's manifest and crystallized in black and white.

[00:13:23] And so I really thought it was something that we had to do, really try our hardest to let it happen again. And if we had not been active in engagement and education around the referendum, I think our First Nations friends, including those who are part of the queer community, would feel right; they would be right to feel that when we were called on after having gone through something remarkably similar a few years before, that we weren't there. That once we had won respect and esteem for ourselves and our relationships, we considered that fight over. And in refusing to lend support to others, we had pulled the ladder up behind us. And that really would have been, you know, an act of bastardry and betrayal, not only of First Nations communities, but also of our own community's own history of activism.

[00:14:10] And so that's why I think our community is so important. I think our communities, when called to do so, must recognise that our own experiences with the sharp edges of the world mean that the struggle for the recognition of the depth of one's humanity – it's a struggle that we know all too well; it's been our struggle, and it should be the struggle to which we will always lend our support. So my reflection, Giri, is that it doesn't serve our communities, whether they're communities of colour or queer communities or young communities, to act in isolation when, or to view ourselves in competition when in fact we're united by the same aim. We should instead be making promises to push each other forward. Wherever there are people yearning for dignity and justice, we will rally with you. Wherever there are people fighting to be admitted as equal members of our community, we will fight alongside you. We will replenish the front lines of social progress together, because as they say, my liberation is bound up in yours.

[00:15:18] Well, the future is bright with young people like you, Alan, that's for sure. I might throw to Sisonke next, because you heard, in a sense, I know, hard act to follow, but I know you can do it. But one of the things that I think I noticed in terms of the first two answers, they were talking about processes or campaigns. Well, in Noreen's case, you were talking about the lack of

data, but data is a mechanism by which you can often seek to agitate for change. And then, Alan, of course, we're talking about actually building coalitions of support in a particular way. But there are different ways in which you can build support to fight racism, and data is clearly an important tool.

[00:15:59] But Sisonke, I know that you're a storyteller, and you talked about the power of storytelling. I just, you made me for 20 seconds, a story that came up when Sisonke and I were talking about how Sisonke and I first met, which is only this week. And this is the power of stories, just in our conversation, is that we discovered we went to the same primary school in Lusaka, Zambia, about 41 years ago, which is kind of remarkable. And completely, both displaced, though. I, my family, was displaced by the civil war in Sri Lanka, your family displaced in exile from South Africa due to your father's work with the ANC. But really, just tell us, Sisonke. Storytelling. How do you, why, or how or why is storytelling powerful to combat racism?

[00:16:43] I guess, you know, for me, the thing about storytelling is that it is the oldest app invented by humans, right? So, like, if you want people to learn something, you can give them an instruction, or you could tell the kids about this monster that lives in the river. And if you go anywhere near the city, you can tell them about it. Same thing will happen to you that happened to that small boy 3,000 years ago, right? The kids are going to remember the story. So, storytelling is an app for education. It's an app for remembering things and for helping us connect with the things that matter to us. So, for that reason alone, I love storytelling, and it's something that I find particularly important.

[00:17:31] But, of course, when it comes to racism, we know that people are moved by stories, yeah? So, my favorite, you know, one of my favorite humans in the world was Mary Lou Kuhn, who was the Benedictine nun, and she says, you know, engrave this upon your heart. There isn't a person that you couldn't love once you've heard their story, right? So, stories give us that connection between a thing that happened and then a way of understanding and embracing it. And when it comes to racism, we understand that people are on a journey. We have to understand when it comes to racism that there are huge amounts of defensiveness. I think Australia is such a good example of a country in which the stakes feel incredibly high for white people in admitting their racism.

[00:18:23] And yet it is a historical fact that this country has a deeply racist history, continues to exercise racism in profoundly contemporary ways. And yet there is something profoundly difficult about accepting and admitting that for many, many white people. It is what it is. So, I won't fight it anymore. We have to figure out ways to address it. And one of the ways to address that is to really help people to think about their own story and how their story counts in relation to others. And I'll just say quickly that one of the methodologies that we, that I use when I do storytelling for social justice, is that whenever I'm in a room with people and we begin to sit down, we do these small workshops.

[00:19:09] And there will be the most powerful person in the room will often say, 'You know what? I'm going to sit this out because I want other people to share their stories.' You know, I don't

really have a story to tell. Because privilege equates to no story to tell, right? In their mind. And then the least powerful person will often come to me and say, 'You know what? What I have to say doesn't matter. I can't articulate it in a way that's fancy.' And I don't want the other people to like laugh at me. So the most powerful person will often not be interested in sharing their story. And the least powerful person will often not want to share their story. And so the insistence that everybody listens to one another because opting out of a story is opting out of vulnerability.

[00:19:51] And of course, opting out can come from a place of vulnerability. So we often insist in the work that I do in storytelling that we have to hear one another in very deep ways. And the power of storytelling is not just the power of telling the story. It's the power of having to be forced to listen to the story. So, yeah. That's beautiful. Thank you. I definitely want to read more of your stories. Such a beautiful storyteller. But you talked about vulnerability. And I just want to tie that back to I'm going to throw to Nora next, in terms of it's the same thing I raised a bit with Alan. The vulnerability that comes from intersectionality. And Nora, of course, you're a woman of colour and you're Muslim.

[00:20:36] And those three things can intersect in particular. And you've actually spoken eloquently and beautifully about it in the past. But I guess in this current environment that we're in – this febrile time – how do you see that intersection manifesting in terms of the racism? You don't have to talk about yourself necessarily, but in terms of the communities of people like you and how they experience it. Thanks, Gary. I'd also like to begin by going back to your question. I'm very happy to be here. Thank you for acknowledging the Gadigal people and paying my respects to the elders past, present, emerging, and any in the room today. So, intersectionality. I'm the triple whammy. I'm Asian. I'm Muslim. I'm female. Actually, there's a fourth whammy. I'm a hijab-wearing sister.

[00:21:17] And as Zahra really eloquently this morning pointed out and spoke about her experiences and the experiences of those of her friends, as well as family members, and the family about their experiences of wearing the hijab. Really, I share that. I think I was nodding the whole time and probably many in the room who do wear the headscarf as a marker of their faith and, in a very public way, do share those experiences. And, as a visible marker of my faith, the hijab brings unique challenges, but it also brings opportunities. And I want to talk about both as well, because sometimes we focus so much on the challenges of Islamophobia that we need to talk about those things, in order; and I keep saying this, in order to talk about social inclusion, we need to start with social exclusion.

[00:22:09] We need to know why people feel excluded or even the perceived exclusion, the perceived psychological exclusion as well. These are really important terms when we talk about racism, because all too often we talk about what is visible. And I want to talk also about what is invisible, but in this case, this is visible. And what does that mean for me in a very physical way is that, yes, this includes verbal assault. This includes physical assault. It includes the microaggressions that are both sexist and Islamophobic. So for example, I've been asked if I'm oppressed. I can't even remember how many times I've been asked that question. Or if I'm, you know, I'm a Muslim, if my husband or, you know, my father forced me to wear it or my brothers

forced me to wear it.

[00:23:01] Again, assumptions that really undermine who I am, my own agency, to more or less say that as a Muslim woman, I cannot make a choice in a matter that I deeply feel very passionate about. Sorry, I use my hands a lot. So this is going to happen a few times. So we really ignore the diverse reasons why a Muslim woman chooses to dress a certain way or not dress a certain way based on societal, you know, expectations. And these intersectionality, intersectional identities also impact my personal safety. I'm talking about myself, my personal safety, my mental wellbeing, the constant vigilance that's required to navigate public spaces and the stress of anticipating discrimination can take a toll on someone's mental health. A Muslim female's mental health. And this is found over and over again.

[00:23:58] We've highlighted this in our Islamophobia Registered Australia research. I know that the commission in their 2021 published report on sharing the stories of Australian Muslims have also highlighted this. So it's exhausting. So anytime there, well, anytime there's a high-profile terrorist attack, we literally get on our phone. As a Muslim female, I will tell you this. Well, actually, the whole Muslim leadership, as a Muslim female, we get on our phone and we're just keeping up to date with the news, whether it's or social media platforms, over and over again, literally telling ourselves and on WhatsApp groups, 'please don't let it be a Muslim.' Please don't let it be a Muslim. Please don't let it be a Muslim. And then if it's not a Muslim, it's a sigh of relief.

[00:24:41] That shouldn't be my response to the fact that there's been a terrorist attack. That shouldn't be the response that a sense of relief because I should be grieving. I should be upset. I should be sad and I should be hurt. I should be shocked. I should be all these things about the event itself. And yet at that moment in time, my human instinct is to say, I can actually walk the street tomorrow. I can enter a train or I can do this. I can do that and not worry for my physical safety. But if it is a terrorist attack that could be perpetuated by say a Muslim, then it's getting on the phone. Please be careful. Do you have to go out tomorrow? Why don't you stay back?

[00:25:24] These are, this is what we navigate every day. So those are really the, I guess, overt racism that intersectionality plays in the sense of a very visible Muslim sister. But there's also the very, what I call the covert, which is, and there are two things that sometimes play out, and it's well-intentioned. It's absolutely well-intentioned. And this is the thing with racism that is such so insidious. There are times when I'm pitied; I'm pitied. You know, you could go so much better in your career if you didn't wear this, or you could do this. So the constant pity – you know, you don't need to wear this. You don't need to be this way. You don't need to be that way as if I need to be saved as a Muslim sister.

[00:26:10] Then there's also the exceptionalism. And I take great offense to this because once you speak and engage with me, you realize she speaks pretty perfect English. Forget that. I have two degrees in linguistics, but let's just say I speak perfect English. And then I'm pretty darn charming and smart. You laughed, so it must be charming. And then you exceptionalize me. And I know that's not a word, exceptionalize, and you know, coming from two linguistics degrees, you know, but I wanted to put that out there. But oblige me here. You see me as an exception. And I

get told this: oh, wow, you're so incredible. You're so incredible for a Muslim female. You must be an exception. Oh, your husband lets you travel by yourself. You left home at 18 to study, never went back home.

[00:26:58] Wait, you've got a PhD, have three kids, and a grandmother, and doing all these amazing things. How have you decided, despite your faith? So there's, like I said, it's a personal safety, psychological, but there's these really covert racism. Pity, and I need to do a paper on this. Pity. Pity, and exceptionalism that we probably navigate on a very regular basis that doesn't get spoken about. So intersectionality for me is all these layers and layers of complexity and nuances, but it means to just trying to navigate in a public space and just be rather than who you'd like me to be or who you see me to be. Thank you. That was incredibly insightful. One of the things you talked about, I'm going to throw to Benny in a second, is the toll that it takes.

[00:27:49] And Benny, you've been a strong advocate for refugees in this country and in Queensland, particularly refugees of African background. But once, there may have been a moment of weakness, I don't know, it was a sad conversation between us. You said to me, refugees and the refugees you represent come to this land with incredible hope and faith and belief in a better future. But for some, sadly, over time, it turns to despair and hopelessness and racism plays a real part. And that, how does racism play a part in that? Thank you so much. I think, I just want to acknowledge everyone here and I want to pay my respect to the elders, both past, present, and emerging.

[00:28:33] And I think over the past few years, for a lot of people who have been watching me on the media and also in the community, it's been a very deliberate decision to kind of stop talking about or worrying about racism in general and try to look at what needs to be done. So, what aspect of racism should we talk about? And I thought about the importance of the relationship between power and what's happening in our society. And I think if the conversation shifts from getting upset about racism in general to responsibility and accountability, I think that's so important. And the question is, who is responsible for fixing racism or systemic discrimination? And you can see a clear link between power, authority, and racism.

[00:29:56] And for me personally, what hits the most are the comments made by people in positions of power and authority, and the behavior of the people in leadership roles. And if we want to see a difference as a country, we need to look at the same multiculturalism that we see in the park when people are celebrating festivals. Our institutions should also reflect their diversity. And most importantly, the role of leadership. Leadership across different sectors, leadership at all different levels. If you go to workplaces, for instance, and you don't see their diversity, the people that allocate resources and appoint people into positions of management, and all of that... if we want to address racism and want to see people feeling belonged and included, we need to look at leadership in this country.

[00:31:09] And I think there's something about us as a country, as a country of Australia, we don't like to have a conversation about power. The moment you start to talk about power and leadership, you can see things change. And it's important that we identify genuine leaders, leaders that are

ready to change the status quo. And I've seen very few people that step up. And every story, success story of a man, a migrant or a refugee or First Nation people. If you hear someone who has done something great, you can clearly link that to someone who was in the position of leadership and believe in them and empowered them. That's the only way you can change things. For me, I just want to make it clear when you see the number of our young people in the criminal justice system, it's growing quite significantly.

[00:32:12] And I go to a lot of different youth detention centers every week. And the numbers are increasing significantly. And that's because young people don't feel belong. These people that have created different identity for them, they don't feel they belong to this country. And if those people in the position of power and leadership, regardless of private community or other sectors, if they step up and provide opportunities for people that don't look like them, that can inspire young people. They can feel belong. If you work hard, you can be somewhere. So for me personally, what I would like to share with everyone here is the importance of identifying like-minded people, genuine leaders who are ready to step up and change the status quo. That's the only way we can change issues to do with racism in this country.

[00:33:14] Thank you. Thanks, Benny. That's a great point, Benny. There are leaders at this table. There are leaders out here. But the old union adage, 'united we bargain, divided we beg', right? It's the same for this. When you want to fight against racism, you need allies and supporters because there are plenty enough people who attack you and bring you down. So really strong point. Geoff, I thought it would be good to come to you last in terms of these questions. Because you've written extensively on Jewish politics, the politics of multiculturalism. And what do you think now, particularly as a scholar of multiculturalism, are the most significant issues of racism causing social disruption in Australia? Thanks, Gary. I'm not going to give an acknowledgement, not because I don't endorse it.

[00:34:06] It's because if I start, I'll spend my four minutes talking about this country's shameful treatment of its First Nations. I want to reserve some minutes for what I've been asked. Racism is typically experienced in the first person, even when it's experienced systemically. And my co-panelists have shared some of that experience here this evening. But Gary, you've asked me a general question, so I'm going to highlight it. I'm going to highlight a general phenomenon and problem. When there are international flare-ups or outrages, ethnic or religious minorities associated with the offending actor, international actor, are typically targeted in Australia. That was the case with Chinese Australians when China was accused of spawning the COVID-19 virus and, of course, it's the case today with Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the wake of the October 7th Hamas attacks and Israel's conduct in the Gaza war.

[00:35:23] There's two things going on there. One is the ascription of collective responsibility. But the other thing is even more fundamental. It's the penchant for delineating people into groups. And this last feature is actually a default, even a natural tendency. Our mental maps, our sense of the social topography or geography, is typically to assign people to groups. Often that is harmless. Often it's innocuous. Sometimes it's even positive. If somebody said 'African Americans have rhythm,' nobody would much mind. Of course, the problem is when the group characterization is

demeaning, derogatory, exclusionary or vilifying. But there are two other complications here. One is that the group ascription is often wrong. It's often a misdescription. People are misidentified with groups, especially in highly immigrant-rich societies. And the second problem is normative.

[00:36:38] As liberal democratic citizens, we have our own individual status and standing. We have our own bundle of individual rights. We have our own status, our own relationship to the state and to fellow citizens. So I think that we don't do a good job in this country of teaching our young folk and people in general how to think about themselves, how to think about, understand and negotiate the rather confusing terrain of acceptable and non-acceptable groupisms. Or even when no groupism is really appropriate and we should be treating each other solely in terms of our individual standing. We leave folks to sort of fumble their way through this, often with ugly results and often with social disruption. Thanks. Thanks, Chip. That whole notion of the 'other', isn't it?

[00:37:39] That sometimes and often part of the problem is, of course, you centre, you start from the white centrality and then diversity is anyone that's not white. They become the other and they're not part of the Australian identity or national consciousness. So we've heard about how racism operates, but I'm an optimist. I always think we can do better. I think Rosalind Croucher last night said she's a glass-half-full person. So am I. I'm of the same view. You have to be. You have to believe that you can do better for our children, for our children's children. So one of the things that we've been doing at the Australian Human Rights Commission, the fantastic race discrimination team, some of whom are here today, shout them out, they're brilliant, they've been working on a national anti-racism framework.

[00:38:20] People ask me, 'What is that?' It's a fair question. What I would say it is, is it's a call to action to all levels of government and to the civic and business sectors. To bring about the changes across all areas of our lives that are required to combat racism. It begins with improving racial literacy, which we are actually quite poor at in this country. And then we have to; it then moves on to address racism, but particularly structural racism in the significant areas of life, education, employment, justice, data collection, and the media. And it is actually a once-in-a-generation opportunity to try and bring about significant change. And I know, I think it was last night, where I was asked people to put their hands up in support of the Human Rights Act.

[00:39:06] And I'm going to try and get you all to do that in terms of the national anti-racism framework when we're done. But in terms of that framework, Noreen, I'll throw to you first, you talked about the difficulty in actually identifying and capturing the data on First Nations disempowerment or racism in employment. How do you think the framework could help potentially in terms of the issues First Nations people face in employment? I don't know that it's just First Nations people. Of course. And I do have cultural diversity in my makeup as well. So I can speak from a number of intersecting places. But I think what I'd like to see in the framework, and as we move into a new act, and I notice in the suggestions that it's all about giving business help, about how they can apply.

[00:39:59] For example, in the respect at work, recommendations, there's a whole lot of suggestions about helping businesses. Now, it seems to me, and we talked about it in the earlier

session, that the problem we have is almost definitive. The problem that we have in terms of the culture in employment, in employment seeking, in workplaces, in every aspect of employment, which is the biggest thing for most Australians. The problem we have is that the current Acts aren't binding. And what we need to be doing in the formulation of a new Act is ensuring that they are binding on workplaces. And in any framework, we have to make business accountable. We need to stop saying 'poor' business. Now, I've worked across the community sector, the trade union movement, and then the Diversity Council Australia.

[00:41:05] So I've had a lot of experience with a lot of the different workplaces from small business to unionised workplaces to unregulated workplaces. And I think we're too soft on them. We need to make businesses in this country accountable. And it's not just about anti-slavery. It's not just about free prior and informed consent in workplaces. The data that we have from Dariella says that there's really high levels, and we knew this anecdotally, but we needed to go and find out. I mean, we talk, as Lil's laughing at me and with me, but, you know, a constant topic of our whole being's and discussing the racism that we experience, especially at workplaces. And you can't; we ask, we seek the business being accountable in all these areas, but not around the application of the Human Rights Act.

[00:42:04] And racism is one of them. So if we're moving towards an anti-racism framework, I have a strong view that we need to make people who employ people accountable for how their workplaces look. Make the racism that, and I agree, I agree with you, Benny, we need to start coming from a strengths-based place around this. But the fact of the matter is, is that so many people experience racism at work and intersectional discrimination. So as we look at the framework and as we think about it being applied, my expertise is workplaces and I speak for them. The levels of racism have to stop. Is it by binding, ensuring that there is a balance between the binding nature of whatever legislative framework applies? Because it can't go on. Yeah. Something that forces action.

[00:43:08] Something needs to happen. It can't go on as it is. Australians can't seem to - can't think anymore that it's the case that the policies that is, which are, for those who don't know, your policies at work are how these acts are applied in the workplace, are somehow optional. So I think it's important to comply with it. And I'll say again, and if you're a practitioner, don't get personally offended because they get into a tizzy when you say it, human rights industry, you've had 45 years to make this effective. Do your job. Alan, what do you think is the most important aspect of a national anti-racism framework? Yeah, I mean, I think the proposal is a great one. It's the modernisation of anti-discrimination legislation.

[00:43:55] I moved to a proactive model where we have a lot of different ways to address it. It's a very common way of treating it in the first place, better collection of data, stronger media standards, kind of political leaders. I think they're all common sense approaches to better tackling racism. I think potentially the most important component will be around convening public discussion, and in particular, building a really genuine and durable understanding of the facts and effects of racial discrimination, especially amongst a significant minority in our community who I think remain really sceptical of the project. And, you know, we have done a remarkable job of

moving conversations in circles like this, people who are attuned to social justice.

[00:44:31] But I think we see in Australia, and even more strongly abroad, that there is a really growing politics of resentment and grievance that is really pushing back. I mean, think of the United States. And especially where there is insecurity and precarity, our societies will rediscover this really ferocious muscle memory to blame folks that we don't understand. And it reveals that the apparent consensus that we had on some of these issues, at least in polite society, has been far more brittle, more fragile than we ever thought really possible. And so I think there is some work to be done to go back and bring these folks along. And these are people who are sceptical of the project for racial justice, who often feel that they do have some genuine sense of being marginalized themselves and who feel neglected as their communities progress in ways that they feel are moving away from them.

[00:45:23] And I get the frustration with this proposal, the idea that there should be some effort to comfort and convince those who feel alienated by really correct efforts to redress injustice. But I think it is necessary if we are going to change the hearts and minds and build and broaden the base of support for anti-racist interventions and make our societies resilient to the temptations of racism that are rupturing other countries, rupturing other countries. And the other important thing, I mean, this can't be a job that falls to affected communities. Think of the weight of that burden to ask those who have been the subject of racism to prioritize the comfort of those complicit in the discrimination. Like, that would be excruciating. But there are people who have the social capital and the personal capacity to be able to lead these conversations.

[00:46:21] And if you are one of these people who can navigate the world a bit more easily, who can bear the burden of these necessary conversations, then I hope you see that as bestowing some obligation on you. And I reckon that, you know, that building of real broad understanding and resilience in our communities is what will energize and make possible the rest of the framework. So, Sonka, can storytelling sell a framework? Yeah, I think basically like what Alan said, essentially, like everything that Alan said, I think is entirely correct. I do worry about racial literacy in this country. I do worry about the capacity to hold the complexity of the discussions that we're having, which on the one hand are crystal clear, right? Racism is bad. We understand where it comes from, that there's a long history.

[00:47:13] So, on the one hand, it's very straightforward and not complex at all. And on the other hand, it is made complicated, I think, by an environment in which we are constantly having to deal with false equivalencies, where you know, criticisms, you know, of the actions of certain people or certain actors are, you know, called out for what they are not. So, we are constantly having to deal with distractions around the conversation about racism. And that's because the level of racial literacy in this country is very, very low. I think that's a function of a choice. Conversations about race and racism don't have to be complicated; they are made complicated by people who have an interest in keeping them complex.

[00:48:09] And so I guess that's the way to get back to this notion of the kinds of stories that we tell. I think we have a media that is deeply problematic and deeply invested in telling stories that

aren't always truthful, in telling partial stories, in mistelling stories. So the dark side of storytelling is that there is, of course, disinformation and stories that aren't true, right? So there is truth - multiple ways of understanding what is real. And then I think there are ways of obfuscating. So we saw, you know, in the last week, this criticism, you know, of Laura Tingle and being called out for this comment about Australia being racist. There's nothing controversial about that statement. But what is happening in that moment is that some elements of the media are choosing not just to call her out, but to chill all of us.

[00:49:06] So all of us will think twice before, not only do we seek to defend her, let alone defending her, simply talking about racism and saying that there's racism in this country, that it is a long history of racism, and that racism is real in Australia. So the minute you say those words, you become aligned with the kind of people who will be targeted. So that chilling effect is deeply dangerous. And so, yes, of course, stories are very important in how we think about the dissembling that's going on. But it has to be built on a bedrock of a much stronger sense of racial literacy where we don't get into these equivalencies. I think the coverage, similarly, of what's happening in Gaza has been pretty shocking, right?

[00:49:56] Because as we saw at the climate change debates, there's this and there's that. Well, climate change is real. Climate change is not real. We're going to give equal amounts of time to both sides of that argument. I think we have to start to be able to tell what's what from what by having a far more literate, racially literate. Similarly, when it comes to Gaza and Palestine, in Palestine, we need a much more internationally literate ability to have a conversation that is not always bringing us back to very basic points; when really we need to elevate the discussion and be able to say what is actually happening in the context of a place in which there is genocide going on. Right?

[00:50:34] So I think how we choose to tell stories matters very much in a context in which the repercussions for saying certain words and for speaking in a certain way are very particularly profound. It is hard to say these words, and we need to be able to get to a place where there is enough racial and community literacy, where there isn't a blowback. Even if people disagree with us, it doesn't have to be a comeuppance for people that seek to bring them down for saying certain words. Jeff, if you were in my shoes and you were trying to convince government of all levels to take up a national anti-racism framework, what would you say? I'd say, 'what's your shoe size?' 14.

[00:51:32] I'd say that I think the key question here is how to make multicultural democracies work, and that liberal democratic core values matter. I mean, they call for a reason. Liberty must include some cultural values, cultural liberty. Equality must include people of diverse backgrounds and interests. And democracy must include all citizens and allow all voices to be heard. To reprise something that Michael Kirby said last evening, I think it's deeply disappointing, hugely disappointing that the Liberal Party declined to participate in the parliamentary committee that oversaw or is overseeing the commission's initiative for the NAF. And I think the Liberal Party and other parties who declined need to be pressed to explain their disinterest or their lack of interest or to explain and justify their opposition to it.

[00:52:40] As Attorney General years ago in the Abbott government, George Brandis tried to explain his and his government's opposition by saying that they supported the classical liberal rights, freedom of speech, assembly, worship, the press, and everything else with social justice. But in a country that now comprises 30% of its population was born somewhere else, rising to 50% if you include at least one parent born somewhere else, simply insisting on the classical liberal rights alone is not going to make for a successful multicultural democracy. It's not even going to produce a representative democracy. And the other thing I would say is to pick up on the commission's advocacy for a preventative rather than a reactive approach to anti-racism in this country. I couldn't agree more, I couldn't agree more with that.

[00:53:50] However, speaking as a political theorist, I suggest that something more than freedom and equality are required. Liberty and equality lend themselves to being protected legally, but you can enjoy the rights to liberty and equity with and still be marginalized in all sorts of subtle and not so subtle ways. And I think the Anglosphere, Australia is not alone in this respect. The Anglosphere has a tradition of emphasizing liberty and equality, but forgetting the third value in the revolutionary liberal credo, fraternity, which is a bit sexist; let's call it inclusion. And so I think the banner should be 'free, equal, and included' and not just 'free and equal'. Thanks, Steph. Nora, we're running out of time. So, I might, I want it, well, look, I guess it's hard to do it quickly, but maybe as best you can.

[00:55:02] 30 seconds. I do want to ask Benny the last question. Yeah. But in terms of one of the things the framework has to deal with is structural racism; I suppose. Is there a way in which you think it can do that? Do you think? Yeah. As I mentioned, I guess, in my opening remarks, we really need to understand exclusion before we can talk about inclusion and we can talk about the sort of the prevention. And the reality is, Muslims, you know, the Muslim community faces a number of structural, you know, racism, whether it's, you know, employment discrimination. The reality is that, a person with a Muslim-sounding name or a Middle Eastern-sounding name, as you know, research has shown by ANU and University of South Australia, 64 times will have to apply, 64 times, more than somebody with an Anglicized name.

[00:55:50] And that's in the context of employment. But they could have, and many Muslims are very highly educated, and yet the economic and employment outcomes don't match that. So that's shown in the ABS. And we can even talk about sort of the legal as well, you know, the legal racism or anything really to do with counterterrorism. You know, the reality is the Muslim community are quite, feel quite vulnerable when it comes to what they might perceive as, and do perceive as a double standard when it comes to their legal standing. And we see this play out in the media, or the political discourse as well. We've seen in recent times when a 16-year-old boy, the alleged stabber in Wakeley, was immediately deemed a terrorist, like, immediately deemed terrorist, even though he is known to have mental health issues.

[00:56:43] And yet, you know, the 40-year-old stabber who killed five women and one Muslim male, and he was ideological, was not deemed a terrorist. So under the sort of the legal racism itself. But I really want to talk about what's happening now. And what I'm seeing in my role as the executive director of Islamophobia Register Australia is this massive increase, very concerning

increase of Islamophobia happening every single day. So, and I know she's retracted it. So, you know, Gary and I had a conversation this morning. So when Senator Sarah Henderson said there is no Islamophobia, it shocked us. I mean, we are seeing this every single day. We are dealing with cases every single day. What used to be one case a month before October 7th, now we're seeing 20, 30 cases a day.

[00:57:35] And these are just the ones that have been reported. I was in Perth and Adelaide all last week. And the number of people who've told me they've had an Islamophobic incident happen the last few months, but yet have not reported it, just is really an understatement of really how wide-reaching Islamophobic and hate crime is in these issues. Today, we're dealing with the case in Melbourne, where it was quite horrific, where a swastika was actually painted, spray painted, graffitied on a driveway. In fact, I'm giving you guys, you know, giving you guys a little bit of a heads up because there's gonna be a news story on it. So swastika and death, I think it was death to Muslims with the C word that I can't pronounce and, you know, death to Palestinians.

[00:58:25] So here's a woman going out, you know, throwing out her rubbish at about midnight, seeing this spray painted, you know, on. And so to say that, you know, Islamophobia and hate crimes is not a real thing is deeply concerning because how do we get to that, this national anti-racism framework? We don't even know where this exclusion is, where this safety is. So you talk about data, centralized data is exactly what we're all about. This is what the Islamophobic Registrar is all about. It's we need to be able to grab the data to then be able to provide the education. So all of the principles of the framework are really, it really hits home for us as a register because it's all these things that we want to put in place.

[00:59:08] We want, you know, educational programs; we wanna talk about cultural safety. We wanna talk about media regulation and media representation. We wanna talk about justice and the legal protections. This is what's going to make us a robust, inclusive, cosmopolitan society that we want, that we humanize each other. I think the other night, you know, you spoke about that. How do we humanize each other? We humanize each other by seeing each other as completely equal. And the only way to be able to do that is to be able to adjust these issues of exclusion. Thanks, Tori. We are out of time really, but Benny, a message of hope to finish on. Well, I think I need to start with this very quickly.

[00:59:57] When I first got my job as a manager more than 10 years ago, the lady who hired me was an Aboriginal woman by the name Cass Mackenzie. And that's what happened. When you don't see the race, you don't see the ethnicity or tribe. And then she didn't just hire me to work with her under Aboriginal services. She also empowered me. She gave me the resources and the authority to make decisions. And as she did that, I was able to receive the Medal of the Order of Australia. And that had a profound impact. And when I got this necktie, it was also presented to me in the Parliament by one of the Indigenous elders, Auntie Faki Tettman. It has nothing to do with the African community or migrant communities.

[01:00:49] That's how we need to see ourselves. See someone with the potential and empower them. And that will empower all the community. We've seen an incident in Red Bank Land in

Queensland a few months ago. And no political leader wanted to talk at that particular time. And our children were not going to school. So, a lot of parents did not want to send their children to school. And what I did was to look for a number of the daughter of one elderly who was killed by some of the young people. And I made a decision to go there at night. I did not consult any of my relatives or friends because I did not want anybody to scare me and say, 'Don't go.' So, I made a decision, and I said, 'I'm going.' I called her and I said, 'I'm coming.' And she said, 'Come.' So I went there at night and I was the only black person there.

[01:01:41] There were too many white people. They welcomed me. I was not scared. And what happened was, I said to Cindy, 'We need to call for a media conference in the morning because we have to separate the hate that's out there and what happened to your mom, because that has nothing to do with your mom. That's not the legacy for your mom.' We need to go out there in the morning. Let's call for a media conference. And isolate those voices. And we need to make sure that this had nothing to do with race. We did that. Within one hour, the whole narrative changed to a positive story. Thank you, Ben. That was, thank you so much for sharing that story. What a very powerful way to end.

[01:02:30] Giri, did you want to say a few words to close your session? Because I've totally stuffed this and run it over time. All I wanted to do is a quick poll. Who hands up if you're in support of a national anti-racism framework? All in favor, say 'aye.' Yes, their 'ayes' have it. That's all I want to say. Please give this panel and Giri a big round of applause. How incredible. Tackling such a huge topic with their expert analysis and lived experience. Thank you so much. We're going to reset the stage for our next session. So, thank you so much, everyone.