



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

Introduction  
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Annual address on immigration and citizenship  
Old Parliament House  
Museum of Australian Democracy  
Canberra  
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Welcome ladies and gentlemen and honoured guests.

It is my privilege to MC this evening's event – the second year of the Immigration and Citizenship Annual Address.

When Andrew called me to ask if I would consider MC'ing tonight I was mostly daunted, but I was also honoured. I felt honoured because I follow in the footsteps of Deputy Secretary Peter Vardos – a person I have admired and valued over many years.

I felt daunted because Peter is a superb showman who sadly missed his true calling as a panellist on Spick & Specks... but so here goes.

This evening the theme is about our proud and long record in refugee resettlement.

We are privileged to have as our key note speaker Hieu Van Le AO once a refugee to this country and today, Lieutenant Governor of South Australia.

As some of you know I retired last year from the department – my very last position was as the First Assistant Secretary of the Refugee Humanitarian and International Division.

While I don't miss lotus notes and my garden is looking particularly delightful – it has also provided time for reflection.

When your most enduring relationship is with your blackberry and meetings about meetings are considered normal, it is too easy to lose track of the end game.

Tonight provides an opportunity for all of us to reflect, not on Question Time Briefs – but on the national legacy of our work, of our role in shaping the nation.

I took my first job in the department in 1979 –the job was assisting some of the first groups of Indo-Chinese refugees who were being resettled in Sydney.

As I gathered my thoughts for this evening, I again reflected on people I met along the way – one person was a refugee in Kenya, who I believe now lives in South Australia.

He was a participant in a cultural orientation class in Nairobi and he asked me three simple questions.

Those three questions have stayed with me and have often made me reflect on the enormity of the journey a refugee goes through - the hopes and the fears invested in resettlement and the need to feel safe and to lead a life of dignity.

He had been reading about Australia and there were three things that made him curious -

The Australian flag – he wanted to know what it stood for - the colours, the stars and the union jack.

He wanted to know why Canberra was the capital - he heard it was a small town far away from the commercial and economic centres, and was curious as to why government needed to be far away from our country's commercial centres

He wanted to know if the Australian people would welcome him?

He was grateful to the Australian Government for offering him resettlement but he wanted to know if the Australian people supported the government?

He was uncertain if he'd be welcomed, him being so black and Australians overwhelmingly European.

His concluding remarks to this question were that if it was only the government that supported him and not the people, then maybe he should not come?

Packed into those three questions I realised were many conflicting sentiments – of trepidation and hope, of the need to understand the symbols of a nation and how they define us and a wisdom born of displacement and loss unimaginable to so many of us.

I answered the first two well enough (or so I think) but the third made me reflect – and in the end I talked about us as a country of immigrants, how many of us were born overseas and many had come to Australia because of war and displacement.

But I also said making a new life in a new country will have its difficulties -

Misunderstandings happen because we do not understand each other's cultural cues.

Some people will insult him because he is black.

Sometimes the mystery of Australians will make him angry and sometimes make him laugh - importantly - somewhere in that journey he will eventually become one of us – an Australian.

The only other tip that I gave was if he liked sport – and for those of you who know me and my sporting interests (very little) will realise how ironic this is - I told him to join the nearest sporting club as if there is one certain way into the hearts of Australians and into their homes it is to play and like sport.

I start this evening with this short story because I think it is so important for us to always remember where we have come from and where we are going, irrespective of the detours we sometimes make.

Those who have come before us have enriched us all in our cultural and social and economic lives and those who will come in the future, will continue to add to our ever evolving and richly complex national identity.

So, with this welcome and introduction I would now like to invite Andrew Metcalfe, the department's secretary to open this evening's proceedings.