



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Racial Vilification

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Federation of Indian Associations of the ACT (FINACT)

Submission to the Inquiry into Racial Vilification in the ACT

June 2022

About FINACT

The Federation of Indian Associations of the ACT (FINACT) is an umbrella body that represents the interests of more than 15,000 Indian diaspora in and around ACT. It was formed in 2011, consists of 31 member associations representing a diverse community of regional, linguistic, youth, women, and senior citizens. FINACT provides a unified voice for its member associations in fostering integration and promoting multicultural Australia. FINACT's objectives include promotion of multicultural Australia by sharing Indian culture and heritage, integration with the broader Australian society, and cultivating mutual respect through increased social & cultural interaction, sports, and recreation. FINACT works with the Federal and ACT governments by providing constructive feedback and inputs to policy formulation on matters related to welfare, social and economic matters. FINACT's operating principles are – Coordination, Cooperation and Collaboration.

FINACT welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Racial Vilification in the ACT. We thank the Committee Secretary, Office of the Legislative Assembly, for inviting FINACT to make this submission.

Community Consultation

FINACT organised a community consultation session on 14 June 2022 seeking feedback from members of all age groups. In addition, we also sought feedback from individual members who could not make it to the session but were able to provide written and verbal feedback. FINACT also participated in a roundtable meeting on racial discrimination in the ACT, organised by the ACT Human Rights Commissioner on 2 February 2022.

What did we hear?

1. Canberra is an inclusive and welcoming city

Canberra is one of the most inclusive and welcoming cities in the world. It is one of Australia's most culturally diverse cities. We have people from all over the world. Canberrans celebrate the National Multicultural Festival (NMF) with great enthusiasm and passion. We acknowledge that the majority of Canberrans respect and value culturally and linguistically diverse communities and treat people respectfully.

2. Racism on the rise

The Australia Talks¹ National Survey 2021 found around three in four Australians with non-European ancestry say they have been discriminated against because of their ethnicity.

Despite Canberra being an inclusive and welcoming city, there have been a number of racial abuses reported during COVID-19 pandemic years. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] This article³ reported in the Canberra Weekly highlighted the severity of the issue. It provided an opportunity to talk about the issue and the need to act and do something about it. Similar cases also reported in other cities^{4,5}. Experts say an anti-racism strategy is needed and recognition is just the beginning.

¹ <https://australiatalks.abc.net.au/>

³ <https://canberraweekly.com.au/racism-is-on-the-rise-in-the-act-and-we-must-talk-about-it/>

⁴

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-31/australia-talks-racism-discrimination-society/100172652?fbclid=IwAR1xOC4eBmd5x35LqDHRfaBeEnm0122HpL3zlip6102Fzfe9hkBfp2JQJDg>

⁵

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/17/australia-urged-to-adopt-plan-to-fight-resurgence-of-racism?fbclid=IwAR38XgdOWr4ek3XbqUjpS0deYCHnuXPwmi_VUQCHACNCAH6y3P-eKIN49SM

3. Subtle, casual racism is common

Racial discrimination is often subtle and happens within known circles, at work⁶. Many of the members who attended the consultation session experienced subtle racism at some stage. The following statement reported in a news article summarises the issue really well - “when someone calls me ‘that Indian girl’, it echoes the taunts of kids in primary school who wouldn’t allow me to play with them because I was brown, or who made fun of Indian culture and accused me of smelling like curry”⁷. Second and third generation Australians don’t like to be referred to by their ethnicity and race.

None of the members who attended the session have ever reported racist comments made against them. None of them knew what to do, where to report. This is a genuine issue. Causal and subtle racism is hard to prove and often goes unreported. It is not systemic. It is driven by personal bias and lack of awareness of cultural diversity and sensitivities.

International students who do odd jobs at odd hours face a lot of racist attacks. This article reported in Canberra Weekly⁸ is one example.

4. Don’t know what to do or who to report

The process of making a complaint is not known or accessible to most Canberrans. Often, we can’t identify a person in relation to whom a complaint may be made, which makes it difficult to complain.

None of the members who attended the session knew where to report or the existing reporting mechanism. Members who have experienced racism don’t know what to do and who to report. There is a need to promote and educate what to report, where to report. There is a compelling case to promote harmony and anti-racism, particularly among youth. Racism can have significant negative impacts on individuals, and can lead to poor mental health

⁶ <https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/how-to-address-subtle-racism-at-work/100026746>

⁷ <https://the-riotact.com/its-2020-and-some-people-still-think-all-people-of-colour-look-the-same/>

⁸

<https://canberraweekly.com.au/the-reality-of-international-student-life-in-canberra/?fbclid=IwAR0D8E8erQdz16Eoa6bHGrW-bnJcwsVT9ZbhdBk7XIIEuZQZVjT-sMUFunY>

and low self-esteem. It was noted that police often don't record complaints unless the situation escalates into physical abuse and violence. So what do you do when faced with a racist slur? The HARD Project⁹ is a notable initiative to raise awareness and document stories. This page was created by an individual who faced severe racist attacks right here in Canberra in 2021.

5. Teach anti-racism education from an early age

Teach anti-racism education from an early age – about diverse cultures and traditions. It is easy for them to adapt. Building resilience in our kids is important, so they stand up for themselves. Older students can share their experiences and what goes through them, and how it affects them. Having regular conversations helps to tackle the problem. Asian students are prone to racist attacks more often than kids from other backgrounds. There is unconscious bias which needs to be addressed through education. Even teachers from Asian and other multicultural backgrounds are subjected to harassment and harsh treatment in the classrooms.

There is a need to introduce cultural exchange programs in ACT schools. Community organisations such as FINACT and other community associations can assist in promoting cultural exchange programs. There is a need to integrate intercultural learning into school curriculum. Develop culturally inclusive teaching and learning. The NSW Education Department has developed excellent anti-racism programs and culturally inclusive activities for kids.^{10, 11} We recommend similar programs to be developed in the ACT.

Understanding cultural differences is important. We should invite broader community members to multicultural events to get to know different cultures.

We should be making use of social media to promote awareness and reporting of incidents. Encourage reporting. Reasons for reporting are often not sure of the benefits of reporting. This needs to be addressed through a dedicated helpline, assisting members to register incidents to surface the problem.

⁹ <https://content-artist.com/connections/the-hard-project/>

¹⁰ <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2005-0235>

¹¹ <https://racismnoway.com.au/>

Discussing the issue more openly by sharing lived experiences is a good way to raise awareness.

What can we do to tackle the problem?

FINACT requests the Standing Committee to consider the following recommendations:

1. Teach anti-racism education in ACT schools. Include topics related to multicultural and inclusive society as part of the school curriculum.
2. Introduce cultural exchange programs, in collaboration with community organisations such as FINACT.
3. Allocate additional resources to the ACT Human Rights Commissioner to be able to do its job well. Over the last 10 years the Commissioner has been entrusted with a lot of additional functions resulting in increased workload and complexity.
4. Implement a simple reporting mechanism. Make it more accessible. Promote it widely, including through CMCF and its members, so everyone knows what to report, where to report.
5. When approached by community members with a racial complaint, ACT Police should assist and direct them to the complaint process, instead of discouraging members.
6. Encourage and fund community initiatives such as the HARD Project, which allows members to share their experiences, which is helpful and builds resilience.
7. Develop a robust anti-racism strategy for the ACT, noting that recognition is just the beginning.
8. Provide grants to multicultural associations to promote anti-racism education. Associations can host workshops and panel discussions on resilience building, tips for parents and kids, how to say no to racism, etc.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Federation of Indian Associations of the ACT (FINACT) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians and recognise their culture, history, diversity and their deep connection to the land.