

## SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

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**The Hon. JOHN HATZISTERGOS** (Attorney General, Minister for Citizenship, Minister for Regulatory Reform, and Vice-President of the Executive Council) [5.00 p.m.]: I move: That this House at its rising today do adjourn until Tuesday 9 March 2010 at 2.30 p.m.

**The PRESIDENT:** I remind members that the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane is about to make his inaugural speech. I ask members to respect the tradition in this Chamber of extending to the member the courtesy of being heard in silence.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE** [5.01 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): With the indulgence of honourable members I rise to deliver my inaugural speech, and in doing so, I pay tribute to the traditional owners of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, particularly the elders, past and present. I wish to acknowledge the presence of my family, who continue to be my foundation and whose support strengthens my resolve to achieve every single day. Also in the public gallery are many distinguished friends who have come to lend their support. Thank you, one and all.

It is a great honour and a privilege to stand here in this historic place representing the Australian Labor Party—a Labor Party that represents a history of commitment to giving all Australians a fair go regardless of race, colour or religion. I am deeply conscious of this responsibility, and I am aware of the community and media interest that I have attained as the first Australian of Arabic-Lebanese-Muslim heritage to enter Australia's oldest Parliament. My entry into this House is proof to the world that we are an inclusive society, a democratic, pluralistic, secular society, open to all, irrespective of creed, race, or colour. I am proud of my heritage, proud of my family and proud of who I am. I am first and foremost an Australian, and like all members here, I will always put Australia first.

Today I intend to give a glimpse of my personal story, a sketch of my values and motivations, and some of my interests on matters of politics and community. So first, the glimpse about myself. I was born in southern Lebanon in 1965 in a village of Konin. It was in Beirut where my father later worked and earned a living, and he worked tirelessly to secure our future. My mother, on the other hand, was the guiding force, caring for 11 children. She did it with love and dedication. With the ever-present threat of war in the south and in the thick of Lebanon's most ferocious civil war, it was inevitable that my parents would make the decision to pack our bags and leave our home for Australia.

We arrived at Sydney airport on 25 May 1977 and made Rockdale our home. At an early stage I developed an interest in politics and an interest in matters of social justice. In Sydney I attended many political rallies and community events and through my engagements I became actively involved in community affairs. To many people in need I was the interpreter, the youth worker or the social worker, and I was the education officer and community liaison officer. Even at the tender age of 13, I would accompany people to their place of destination and help them in their need. Many people at the time needed assistance.

It was inevitable that, at the age of 17, I would join the Australian Labor Party. It was inevitable because it was a party that I believed in because it was about justice and humanity. I was proud when the Premier of New South Wales the Hon. Barrie Unsworth after his 1986 narrow by-election win in Rockdale praised the Mouslimani family for his victory. He won the seat by 56 votes. While my father and older brothers worked I was given the opportunity to seek an

education.

I attended Rockdale Public School for a year and then went on to James Cook Boys High, then on to tertiary studies where I attained a degree in Government and Public Administration from Sydney University, then a Masters degree in Politics from Macquarie University and, finally, a degree in law from the University of New South Wales. I am proud that I was formally introduced into the Supreme Court of New South Wales as a practicing solicitor by the Hon. Robert McClelland, the then shadow Attorney General and Attorney General today.

During my years of tertiary education, however, I was engaged in a variety of community issues. In 1986 I was chosen by my community, and with the assistance of the Australian Government, to travel to Lebanon to help with Lebanese migration applications and I then assisted the Australian Embassy in Syria as they processed the applications. Many applicants were successful and one of those was Mr Ali Hammoud, an engineer. In 1997 he and his wife, Manel Issa, opened their first beauty salon. Today they have 24 salons employing over 260 people. I am proud to say that they recently won the prestigious 2009 National Award for Initiative.

In 1995 I was elected councillor to Rockdale City Council and in 1997 I joined the Australian Republican Movement and was selected as a candidate on the ballot paper for the Constitutional Convention Elections. I was also a student activist when the government of the day failed to listen. I still believe that free access to education is a matter of responsible government. I was elected as a student representative to the faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales and there I continued to advocate for the protection of student rights.

My childhood memories, however, were of conflict and hardship. Peace in Lebanon was a rarity. I do not as a child recall experiencing extended periods of peace and security. Successive Israeli Arab wars, combined with the Lebanese civil war, continued for many years. A tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye will see no end to the continuing death and destruction. One of our greatest twentieth-century icons was a man who espoused the wisdom of peace, Mahatma Gandhi. He rightly said:

An eye for an eye will leave the whole world blind.

Never a truer word spoken, and world leaders are blinded by this continuing cycle of vengeance. There has been over 60 years of Israeli-Arab conflict with no end in sight. They must now open their eyes to see peace as the only way forward and a solution to a Palestinian statehood must be found.

Madam President, like you and like honourable members, I will not shy away from stating my hopes and beliefs. I hope for and believe in peace, and I believe that the people of Palestine have a right to a State of their own. United Nations resolutions on Palestine must be adhered to and implemented, an independent State of Palestine created and the Palestinian diaspora be given the right of return. I believe that the two-state solution can be the basis of a durable and just peace and peaceful co-existence between the two peoples. As a signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we must practise what we preach. In 2008, Australia and the rest of the world celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the campaign slogan, "Dignity and justice for all of us".

Noble it is to uphold the principles of dignity and justice for all and, indeed, to deliver on the rights of our indigenous people. Let us lead the way in justice and human rights for our indigenous people. Let us show the world that we do indeed practise what we preach and give our original inhabitants what they deserve. It is in the area of Aboriginal rights that I believe we can and must do more. Australia has made significant inroads in addressing Aboriginal rights. Our national governments, and in particular our Labor governments, have led the way in this area of human rights. They have introduced the Commonwealth Land Rights Act, increased investment in Aboriginal housing, health and education and set the path towards reconciliation with our indigenous population. Our national governments have also promoted the cause of Aboriginal rights and recognised native title through the historic Mabo legislation. New South Wales introduced a mandatory Aboriginal education policy and was the first State to apologise for the horrendous policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their families.

In my view, issues of national and international importance such as this should transcend party politics. New South Wales can in a bipartisan way lead the nation in Aboriginal social justice and legislate to dedicate parliamentary seats in this House to the indigenous Aboriginal community. New Zealand, Finland, the US State of Maine and Canada have found ways to give their indigenous people parliamentary representation and have proved effective in improving indigenous representation. I believe we, too, can give our indigenous people parliamentary representation. We should empower our Aboriginal Australians and give them the platform they need to articulate their concerns and to define their rights. It is time that we recognised their fundamental rights and gave them the dignified existence that they deserve.

I am a strong believer in the trade union movement. After all, it was the trade unionists that formed and launched our great party to represent the poor and the workers. The trade unions were behind much of Labor's agenda for social reform and it was the trade union movement that led the fight, protecting the weak and fighting for the rights of working people. So, it is the trade unions that I believe in and support. For more than a century our people, our party and our union leaders fought hard and through many struggles gained the workers' rights that we enjoy today. The Howard Government WorkChoices legislation sought to destroy a century of rights and gains for the working people of this State. For the Australian Labor Party and, in particular, unions in Australia, the WorkChoices Act became a key battleground. After the 2007 election, Australia's workers saw the end of that dreaded legislation. It was truly a historical achievement and a powerful example of people power. Once again, it was the work of unionists, through the Your Rights at Work campaign, that restored economic and social justice for workers. In Ben Chifley's vision, the Light on the Hill continues to shine. Thanks to the Labor movement, the WorkChoices Act has been repealed and today the Rudd Labor Government has a much fairer and more equitable industrial relations system for all Australians. For that, we can commend our union movement.

I would like to touch on a very topical issue in our society today, that is, the issue of race and racism. We live in a pluralistic and democratic society in which the rights of all are enshrined in our laws, our customs and our Constitution. However, on occasion racism continues to rear its ugly head. Some of our past immigrants have borne the brunt of it. Unfortunately, our Australian Indian community is bearing the brunt of it today. We have a duty to condemn racism and we

can fight it through education and the rule of law. Through our education system we can drive the message home that racism is ignorance and a crime.

Migration continues to bring with it creativity and ingenuity, drive and hard work, talent and aspiration. We can seize upon and employ such talent and creativity for the betterment of our nation. Just imagine the trade opportunities that our Australian Indian community can generate for the people of New South Wales. In 2000, the New South Wales Government established the NSW-Asia Business Council because it recognised the potential of the Asian Australian community in developing and fostering New South Wales trade links with China and the rest of Asia. I believe that we as a government should also now investigate the establishment of a New South Wales-India trade council and a New South Wales-Arab trade council. I believe that the people of New South Wales have an opportunity to gain from trade with the growing markets of India and the Arab world. We have an untapped resource in our Australian Arab communities. They are entrepreneurial, they have drive and initiative and they have a wealth of knowledge of business both here and overseas. I believe that a New South Wales-based Arab trade council established and funded by the New South Wales Government will actively network local and overseas markets. It will promote business with New South Wales, encourage New South Wales exporters and promote investment opportunities in New South Wales.

One of my motivations for entering public life is to help those in need. Today our youth need our help and deserve a fair go. Some of our young are disillusioned and feel neglected and have low self-esteem. It is incumbent upon us to do more for our youth and to devote more government resources to meet their needs. We must help keep our young engaged in body and in mind. It is in this vein that I make a special mention of one of Australia's cherished youth leaders, Father Chris Riley. His Youth Off The Streets foundation is nothing short of exceptional. He has my deepest respect because of his hands-on approach to helping our young people to achieve their best. Let us invest in our youth by extending a helping hand to them to get ahead.

Like former member the Hon. Henry Tsang, I come from a background of first serving my community in local government. In 1995, I was first elected to represent the residents of Rockdale on Rockdale City Council. My council colleagues then elected me to serve a number of times as deputy mayor and four times as mayor. I place on record my gratitude to all the councillors with whom I have worked. In particular I thank the Labor councillors who have dedicated their time and continue to give the community their heart and soul. I wish to recognise them all and to thank the Mayor, Councillor Bill Saravinovski, Councillor Angelo Anestis, Councillor Joe Awada, Councillor Shane O'Brien and other colleagues, Councillor Elizabeth Barrow and Councillor Jan Brennan, for their friendship and support.

I believe that I achieved a great deal as a local government representative. However, my proudest achievement was to be diligent and to respond to all who sought my assistance. I enjoy serving and will continue to serve the community that I grew up in and love. Many members who have a background of serving in local government know that today's local government is no longer about the three Rs—roads, rates and rubbish. Today, the community wants more, demands more and expects more. Many of the mayors and councillors who have joined us here tonight will testify that councils today have far fewer resources at their disposal and those resources are

dwindling more and more as time goes by. Today, local government faces the added pressure of climate change and the resources needed to address it are limited. Some local councils are surviving, but only just. The reality is that in the not too distant future many councils may no longer be viable or capable of meeting modern day community needs and challenges. I therefore believe that it is time for us in a bipartisan way to embrace a council amalgamation reform agenda in the best interests of our citizens.

I have now come to the end of my speech but with your indulgence and the indulgence of honourable members, I would like to take a few moments more to thank a few people, as I am keen to place on record my enormous gratitude to the many people who have stood by me, many of whom are here tonight. First and foremost, I pay tribute to the Hon. Henry Tsang, whose seat in this Chamber I now fill. He has served the people of New South Wales with sincerity and has built significant bridges between our Australian and Asian communities—in particular with the Australian Chinese community which I now have the honour of serving. I thank him for his presence with us here today and wish him and the Australian Chinese community and everyone here tonight, Kung Hei Fat Choy—that is Happy New Year in Chinese.

I am particularly indebted to the General Secretary of the New South Wales ALP, Mathew Thistlethwaite, for his support and endorsement of my candidature. I thank him and wish him well in all his future endeavours. I look forward to working with the Assistant General Secretary, Mr Sam Dastyari, as well as with Brendan Cavanaugh, Courtney Roache and all of my friends in the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party. I express my gratitude to my friends Senator Mark Arbib and the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party, Karl Bittar, the Hon. Edward Obeid and the Hon. Joseph Tripodi for their friendship and support over the past two decades.

I also thank the Hon. Tony Kelly, the Hon. Greg Donnelly, the Hon. Tony Catanzariti, the Hon. John Hatzistergos, the Hon. Linda Voltz, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, the Hon. Kayee Griffin, the Hon. Ian West, the Hon. Mick Veitch, the Hon. John Robertson, the Hon. Penny Sharpe and the Hon. Christine Robertson, as well as the Hon. John Ajaka and the Hon. Marie Ficarra, for their guidance. I also thank you, Madam President, and look forward to working with you and each and every one in the New South Wales Parliament. I acknowledge the Premier, Kristina Keneally—welcome. I am proud that I enter a New South Wales Parliament that has its first female Premier, its first female Deputy Premier and its first female Deputy-President. I am honoured to be part of the New South Wales State revolution.

I thank all the distinguished foreign dignitaries who have come to lend their support today. I acknowledge his Excellency Mr Tammam Sulaiman, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic in Australia; Mr Tarek Abousenn, Consul General of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Sydney; Mr Terry Mullane, Consul General of Morocco; Mr Aleksandar Besarabic, Consul General of the Republic of Serbia; Consul Peng Douyi and Consul Fu Aiming, representatives of His Excellency Hu Shan, Consul General of the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Sydney; and Mr Bassam Chehade, representing the Consul General of Lebanon.

I thank Mr Russ Collison, Mr Andrew Ferguson, Mr Nick Lewocki, the Hon. Graham Richardson, the Hon. Leo McLeay and the Hon. Bill Morrison for their support and guidance. I thank all Centre Unity members for their unanimous endorsement of my candidature and my election unopposed. I thank all my friends and supporters and members of the Labor Party in Rockdale and elsewhere, many of whom are here tonight. They are numerous and extraordinary. They are the people who are loyal and kind and who are always there for me, eager to contribute and make a difference. I thank them all. As I thank the party members in Rockdale, I look forward to working with the community and party members of my duty electorate of North Shore. I wish long-time friends Mr Terry Diamantis, the Hon. Doug McClelland and Mr George Thompson well, and I express my sadness at the passing of a dear friend, Dr Khalil Moustapha. He was a tireless and dedicated community leader.

All members of this House know that to be truly successful in public life one needs a loving and supporting family. I am truly blessed in that regard. I place on record the enormous contribution my family has made to all my endeavours in life. I pay tribute to my Mum, Mrs Jawaher Mohanna Mouslimani, who sadly could not be with us today due to her chronic illness. I also pay tribute to my Dad, Mr Chaher Mouslimani, and all my brothers and sisters, who are all present in the gallery today. I thank them for their guidance and support and for the values they have instilled in me.

I acknowledge and thank my own family—my beautiful loving wife, Mika Fukuta Moselmane—and my father-in-law, Mr Eiichi Fukuta, for his support and for his kindness to us but, in particular, for his love and affection to my son Joseph, who is now 5½ years old. Joseph is over there in the gallery. Joseph has become my Japanese interpreter. He jumps in and translates for me when my father-in-law is trying to tell me something I do not understand. I love him dearly. He is highly intelligent and inquisitive, and he usually gets his way. I thank you, Madam President, and all honourable members for the warm welcome that has been extended to me. My appreciation goes to the Clerk of the Parliaments and all staff members for the courtesy, cooperation and assistance that has been given to me since my entry into Parliament. I thank you for your indulgence.