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**Member :** Mr STONE

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**Information :**

**Mr STONE (Ethnic Affairs):** Mr Speaker, I rise to make a statement on ethnic affairs in the Northern Territory. I extend a very warm welcome to community leaders who are present in the public gallery. I consider the area of ethnic affairs in the Northern Territory to be so important in the fabric of this unique community that it is timely for a ministerial statement to be made.

During the February sittings, I tabled the 1993-94 annual report of the Office of Ethnic Affairs. It has been distributed to each ethnic organisation listed in the Directory of Ethnic Organisations in the Northern Territory, as well as Territory and interstate libraries, Northern Territory government agencies and interstate ethnic agencies. The tabling of the annual report, its subsequent distribution and other government programs are all part of the Northern Territory government's attempts to actively encourage all Territorians to participate in the Territory's development as a harmonious and culturally-diverse community. Members on both sides of this Chamber would be well aware that the Northern Territory's diverse cultural base enriches the lives of all Territorians. The enormous effort by individuals and ethnic organisations in contributing to the community is acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

Territorians born overseas make up a significant proportion of our population. The 1991 census revealed that almost 19% of Territorians were born overseas and almost 50% of those were born in non-English-speaking countries. In nominal terms, these percentages translate to about 32 700 people and 16 400 persons respectively. Added to this, of Australian-born Territorians, census statistics indicate that over 11000 have at least one parent born in a non-English-speaking country. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population numbers almost 40 000 or 22.7% of the total Territory population of 176 000 people. Taking Australia as a

whole, persons born in non-English-speaking countries represent approximately 13.3% of the total population, compared to 1.6% of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. These figures show that persons from non-English-speaking backgrounds make up a much greater proportion of the Northern Territory's population than for Australia and, hence, highlight the importance of the work of both the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Office of Aboriginal Development.

In recognition of the need to service ethnic Territorians throughout the length and breadth of the Territory, the Office of Ethnic Affairs re-established its presence in Alice Springs on 16 January 1995. The re-establishment of the office in Alice Springs, after an 18-month hiatus, has resulted in an enhanced presence with a staff of 3 providing the full range of services available in Darwin currently.

The role of the Office of Ethnic Affairs is primarily to maximise the access of ethnic people to services and information which, in turn, enhances their participation in the social, cultural and economic development of the Northern Territory. The office not only prepares and assists in developing policy, and coordinates Northern Territory government information and services, but also provides its own services such as the Northern Territory Interpreter and Translator Service and overseas qualifications assessment.

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The Ethnic Affairs grants program aims to assist ethnic communities through the provision of funding assistance for innovative projects that promote positive and harmonious community relations. The grants program commenced in 1993-94 as a new initiative and has an allocation of \$100 000 per annum. Generally, grants are provided on a one-off basis for up to \$5000 and cover projects as diverse as attending important workshops, the purchase of national costumes and the support of local multicultural events. Members should note with some pride that the Northern Territory Ethnic Affairs grants program is the third largest in Australia after those in New South Wales and Victoria. I give community leaders my commitment that I will continue to support and promote that program and enhance it over time. While this is to some degree a reflection of the mix in the Territory community, it highlights this government's real commitment to those from ethnic backgrounds now living in the Territory.

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The number of grants provided since 1993-94 has grown significantly. In that first year, 18 grants were approved. However, in 1994-95, the number of approvals had grown to 30. Projects have included funding a person from a non-English-speaking background to attend a domestic violence train-the-trainer program, sending delegates to national conferences, and various projects to preserve some aspects of the different cultures represented in the Territory. The 1995-96 grants program already has attracted applications totalling almost \$200 000. I am greatly

encouraged by that. Being the International Year of Tolerance, the Office of Ethnic Affairs advertised specifically to invite applications in relation to this theme. Applications are being assessed currently and will be finalised early in the new financial year.

Accounted for separately, but within the grants program budget, is annual operational assistance and office accommodation provided to the Ethnic Communities Council and the Multilingual Broadcasting Council. The Northern Territory government has provided both organisations with office accommodation at no charge since about 1987. Might I say that I wish that that accommodation was more salubrious than it is. That is something else that I give a commitment to address. It is estimated that, since 1991, the accommodation assistance to these organisations has been about \$40 000 per annum. This does not include electricity, cleaning and security, for example, which are also accommodated with the costs of running the Office of Ethnic Affairs. Added to this, the government has provided the Ethnic Communities Council with office accommodation in Alice Springs since September 1994, estimated at some \$14 000 per annum, again at no charge to the organisation. As a means of sustaining the success of the grants program, the Office of Ethnic Affairs continues to promote the grants program in regional centres. Further, the office will investigate ways of working more closely with regional communities to develop projects.

In addition to the grants program, the government has provided other one-off grants to communities. An example is assistance to the Kalymnian Brotherhood to install an airconditioning system in its clubhouse. That may be a matter I come to regret in time in that I now have a deluge of applications for airconditioning of community halls which we hope to progress in an orderly fashion over time. The Northern Territory government is willing to consider further one-off proposals, but only where it can be demonstrated that the community involved also will make a contribution to the project. Most community leaders to whom I have spoken have accepted that proposition enthusiastically.

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The Northern Territory Interpreter and Translator Service aims to assist those Territorians from non-English-speaking backgrounds to access Northern Territory government and non-government services. Given that the Territory has over 140 ethnic groups, facilitating access to Northern Territory government and non-government services is a very challenging and important task. The Interpreter and Translator Service has an important role to play in undertaking this very important task. The service is provided free of charge to Northern Territory government and community agencies. The service is also available on a user-pays basis to private individuals, Commonwealth departments and the business sector. The 1993-94 allocation for the Interpreter and Translator Service budget was \$226 000. During

that financial year, interpreting assignments totalled 3109 and translation requests numbered 602. The 10 most in-demand languages were Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, Portuguese, Deaf Sign, Filipino, Italian and Spanish. Members should be aware that, in order to enhance and maintain the professional standard and ability of interpreters and translators, regular training is provided in the areas of law, medicine, welfare, education and ethics.

I turn now to the role of the Overseas Qualifications Unit within the Office of Ethnic Affairs. The unit aims to assist migrants and refugees who possess overseas qualifications to obtain an assessment of their particular qualifications in Australia. Comparative education assessments for general employment services are provided using guidelines developed by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition. Where further study may be necessary to obtain recognition of overseas qualifications, the unit assists clients by obtaining information on study courses and income support available during training. The services of the unit are provided at no charge, but are available only to persons with either permanent residential status or student and working visas. If the unit cannot assess a particular qualification, it will assist the client by contacting the relevant authority.

The office is the publisher of the Directory of Ethnic Organisations. Given the size of the Territory and the remoteness of its communities, this valuable publication facilitates contact with and between the different ethnic organisations. To ensure the directory remains up to date, it is published twice a year.

The Northern Territory government is fully committed to improving the access of non-English-speaking background people and others with different cultural backgrounds to services and information that enhance their equal participation in the social, cultural and economic development of the community. As part of this commitment, the government plays a key role in the Northern Territory Integrated Settlement Plan, which was established to improve the coordination of services to migrants and refugees across the 3 tiers of government - federal, territory and local. The plan was developed by the Northern Territory Settlement Planning Committee which includes representatives from all tiers of government and the ethnic community at large. The plan is undergoing its first annual evaluation currently. The linchpin of the evaluation is consultation, and every ethnic community organisation listed with the Office of Ethnic Affairs has been provided with the draft evaluation report for written comment. To further gain community input, consultations were also held in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin. It is anticipated that the report will be finalised during May and will be presented to the Ministerial Council and Standing Committee on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in June. It will be widely distributed to the public.

Added to the above services, the Office of Ethnic Affairs has a library, conference room, computers and photocopier available for use either by either individuals from non-English-speaking backgrounds or ethnic community organisations. I stress again that I wish that they were more salubrious surroundings, but this is something which we can all work towards in the time ahead. The services of the Office of Ethnic Affairs are only part of those services provided already by the Northern Territory government. Other services and programs specifically for migrants and refugees include: the permanent part-time presence of a Chinese and a Greek interpreter at the Royal Darwin Hospital; funding a full-time multicultural arts officer within the Office of the Arts and Cultural Affairs; provision of intensive English programs for newly-arrived migrant and refugee children; professional development for teachers to teach English as a Second Language; above-establishment English as a Second Language teachers - this means that schools which require ESL teachers can get them in addition to teachers allocated according to teacher/student ratios; production and dissemination of multilingual information relating to emergency procedures, cyclones, housing, health, education and other important issues; priority public housing for victims of torture and trauma; the community housing program which aims to provide maximum tenant participation in the management of community housing; and cross-cultural awareness courses for public contact staff and professionals in both the public and private sectors - for example, police, doctors and lawyers.

In addition to the above, the government has provided ethnic communities with, firstly, land grants via the Department of Lands, Housing and Local Government. These grants have been significant and the unimproved capital value of the individual land parcels at the time of issue of titles was almost \$1.5m. Might I say as an aside that we can be very proud of what the various communities have done with their allocations of land and the way that they have developed their clubhouses over a period of time, much of it done with volunteer labour through the sweated brows of the men and women who comprise these many diverse communities within the Territory. Secondly, there are grants for ethnic community workers, one-off projects and the Linkcare program through the Department of Health and Community Services. These grants totalled over \$210 000 in 1993-94 and almost \$250 000 in 1994-95. Thirdly, there is facilities funding from the Department of Sport and Recreation to assist ethnic communities to construct or renovate their clubhouses. This funding has totalled over \$280 000 since 1993-94.

I must stress that the services which I have highlighted today represent part only of the government's ongoing commitment to migrants and refugees who have chosen the Northern Territory as their home. The government is committed to assisting the Territory to grow in every facet and make it an even more enjoyable place to live for everyone.

Members should note that future initiatives proposed within the Office of Ethnic

Affairs include: the development of an interpreter card for use by migrants and refugees to facilitate their access to services; the development of a handbook for migrants seeking employment in the Northern Territory; examining the implications of a charter of principles for cultural diversity, which New South Wales has just adopted, to guide all government activity; and the development of promotional information to attract more migrants to settle in the Northern Territory. My statement today reiterates the government's view that cultural and linguistic diversity is a valuable resource that enhances all aspects of life. Such diversity should be

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encouraged so that the full potential of the Territory can be realised. I believe that the Office of Ethnic Affairs should be commended for its efforts in advancing this view.

Finally, I would like to recognise the efforts of the ethnic community in supporting the Arafura Sports Festival. In particular, the efforts of the ethnic communities, as ambassadors and individuals billeting many athletes, are to be highly commended. I believe that their efforts not only help foster friendship and closer ties with our northern neighbours, but also enhance our understanding of the different cultures within the Territory. Without the contribution of all ethnic communities, the event this year would not have been the success it was. I contend that we in the Northern Territory provide a shining example for the rest of Australia. I raise this point in view of the federal government's racial hatred legislation which, in the words of the federal Attorney-General, is 'about the protection of groups and individuals from threats of violence and incitement of racial hatred'. While I agree with the broad tenets of this bill, the Northern Territory government will await the final outcome of the proposed legislation before considering what, if any, action is required in the Territory.

I thought it appropriate that a statement be made at this time. As the Minister for Ethnic Affairs for these past few years, I have come to appreciate truly the diversity that makes up our very unique community. I grew up in a town called Wodonga which was situated very close to a migrant resettlement camp called Bonegilla. That name would mean something to many people in the ethnic community. My father was very involved in teaching English as a second language in that community. Indeed, on the Housing Commission estate on which I grew up, I think ours was the only Australian-born family. Thus, from a very early age, I had exposure to that cultural diversity which actually saw us drinking homemade red wine at our dinner table. My wife's parents were born in Slovenia, and that also brought a different perspective to the way that I might view things. I hope that I have brought to the position an expanded understanding. The Northern Territory government remains absolutely committed to the ethnic communities of the Northern Territory. I noticed that a statement on ethnic affairs had not been made for some considerable time and, therefore, I thought this statement would be timely indeed.

Mr Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the statement.

Mr BAILEY (Wanguri): Mr Speaker, we welcome the minister's decision to make a statement on ethnic affairs. We congratulate him on the comments he has made today and what we believe is generally a very beneficial situation for ethnic communities within the Northern Territory.

I pick up a point that the minister made near the end of his speech. At the federal level, we are looking at racial hatred legislation. Recently, in New South Wales, we saw a conviction under similar legislation. I must say that, while there are still issues of racial prejudice within the Northern Territory, from my experience here, in other areas of Australia and in many other parts of the world, racial tolerance in the Northern Territory is probably the best that I have experienced.

Mr Stone: We even put up with the English.

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Mr BAILEY: Yes. I have to say that I fall into the category of a migrant, as a person who came here as a child. Some might suggest that I come from a non-English-speaking area - namely, Manchester in England. Some members opposite make fun of me regularly for the way I speak. Thus, I know what it is to be discriminated against.

On a more serious note, our diverse community contains members who are born overseas and those from Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The perception of an Australian community as largely a white Anglo-Saxon group is totally dispelled if you look around the Northern Territory at the wide range of cultural diversity here. When we talk about cultural diversity, we have to ensure that we do not look only at people's cultural contribution. We need to look also at what ethnic communities contribute to the economy and to the development of the Northern Territory. We should not talk about the contributions of ethnic people as relating only to culture and food. It is much greater than that, and we have to continue to reinforce that within the community. That is a major area in which the different ethnic groups can contribute.

Those who still have contacts in the countries from which they originated can use them to develop business links here. We see that as being very important. During the last election campaign, we referred numerous times to the idea of the 'ethnic bridge'. That uses people who are resident currently in the Northern Territory, but who have ongoing links with their home countries to provide us with the information to develop closer economic and social relations in those areas. It is my understanding that, increasingly, the government is implementing those ideas. Hopefully, we will reach the stage where, particularly within the area of Asian

relations and trade, this is not dominated totally by white Anglo-Saxons as it has been in the past. It is important to place on the record some of Labor's policy statement that we made prior to the last election, which included our suggestion for the Asian Business Advisory Committee:

Territory Labor will establish an Asian Business Advisory Committee made up of representatives of ethnic groups, private industry, the university and the government. The Asian Business Advisory Committee will advise government and the private sector on trade development issues, and work to establish mutually beneficial contact networks between the Northern Territory business community and our Asian trading partners.

In the minister's statement, I noted also his comment that he wants to encourage more migrants to come to the Territory. This is an area in which I believe we have been negligent in the past. We have been travelling to South-East Asia trying to persuade businessmen about developing trade links, but I believe that one of the major areas in which we can develop trade within the Northern Territory is by encouraging migrants with business skills and capital to migrate to the Northern Territory. From the research, and judging by comments made recently in New South Wales, most migrants who enter Australia head to the eastern states, mostly to Sydney and Melbourne. Although those people from our near-Asian neighbours are new to Australia, they have money and they still have very recent contacts in their countries of origin. That makes them ideal people to be developing the links, instead of our trying to work only with businesses currently in the Northern Territory and those overseas. If we have people here who have all that experience in their countries of origin, we should encourage them to establish businesses within the Northern Territory.

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The minister referred to the grants program on a number of occasions. We support that. As we all know, often the Northern Territory is seen as having the highest per capita rates for almost everything. We have a problem in that, although we have almost as many ethnic groups as the states, many of them are quite small in number because of our small overall population. As a consequence, it is much more expensive to run programs here than it is for much larger groups down south. Therefore, it is important for the government to be in a position to support these groups. Often they number only 10, 20 or 30 members, but the cultural benefit to other Territorians is such that, if they had to bear the full cost within their individual associations, it would not work.

While we support totally the concept of the grants program, at times in the past we have had some concern in relation to 2 issues. First, there were instances where certain groups appeared to miss out on support by way of government grants while others obtained them consistently. That situation is in the past and all the indications are that that policy has changed. It is important that all applications for grants are based on merit alone. I do not want to dwell on that, but I am sure the minister understands what I am talking about.

The other issue is that, while I support the decision to help the Kalyrnian Brotherhood with its airconditioning, there are concerns about assisting ethnic groups so close to an election campaign. While it may be appropriate, and we know that promises are made and largesse distributed in all election campaigns, nonetheless there are some problems. Many people from the Greek community telephoned me to complain about what was happening and actually apologised because a very large grant was made just before an election. Not only did the relevant minister receive some publicity over it, but every other minister had his photo taken and every other candidate was involved in the process. Many of the Greek community felt that it was little more than a straight-out political stunt, and they were embarrassed by the way it was run. I say that for the record. We have no problem with the way the grant was made, but rather with the process. Many members of the Greek community, who are Labor supporters and CLP supporters ...

Mr Stone: They were all invited to the function.

Mr Ede: We were not.

Mr Stone: You were not?

Mr Ede: No.

Mr Stone: You have a problem then.

Mr BAILEY: I acknowledge that I was invited to the function. However, the way in which there was very obvious campaigning done at that function caused many members of the Greek community, both CLP supporters and ALP supporters, to be embarrassed. As I said, we support the allocation of the funds but we become annoyed when you try to divide the ethnic community on political grounds prior to an election. That follows on from my previous comments about the way in which grants were given to some community groups in the past. I hope that that is all behind us now.

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My other point concerns the Treasurer's interjection in relation to the comment about

the significant reduction in some areas of grants-in-aid this year compared with last year. He commented that there was no way in the world that they could hand money out at the rate they did last year. That indicates the concern that the level of grants last year had more to do with the upcoming election than normal government policy processes.

I congratulate the minister on the government examining the possible introduction of an interpreter card. I am sure that the minister had copies of Territory Labor's plan in relation to ethnic communities. Probably, he took it straight from that. I read from our platform:

In relation to an interpreter service, Territory Labor will introduce an interpreter card designed to improve access to the interpreter service. The card will be provided through the Office of Ethnic Affairs to any non-English-speaking person for their use in dealing with government agencies, and it will identify that the person needs an interpreter and their community language.

I congratulate the minister on picking up Territory Labor's plan. The opposition is very happy to work with the government to develop initiatives, particularly in relation to community issues and ethnic issues that are not seen as party political issues. I believe both sides of this Chamber have very similar views on the importance of the ethnic communities, and the direction of government support and government policy. I encourage the minister to involve the opposition in continuing to generate the beneficial outcomes that we can all obtain from making ethnic community areas an apolitical issue. By doing that, we can all benefit from the development and growth in a way that is best not only for the ethnic groups but for the Territory as a whole.

It is unclear exactly what the government is doing to ensure that all areas of access and equity are being addressed, especially for people of non-English-speaking backgrounds. I refer to their ability to obtain employment within the public service and their dealings with public servants in relation to other government programs. It is my understanding within the public service that, if you have a certificate in first aid, you receive extra pay. By contrast, however, if you can speak another language, the public service provides no benefit or acknowledgment of that. It would be very beneficial, especially in those areas where interpreters are required, for their skills to be recognised if they are within departments already. A public servant can go to St John and upgrade their first aid qualifications. Wouldn't it be great if we could ensure that the people who have the relevant language skills also have the interpreter qualifications and can use them? When someone in the office next door requires an interpreter, the department knows that and has acknowledged their qualifications by means of an appropriate financial reward instead of simply asking them to do the extra work. I am not saying that this is a huge issue, but we must acknowledge that it

is a very important skill. It may be more important than a first aid certificate, although that is very important also.

We welcome the decision to take on permanent part-time Chinese and Greek interpreters. As we found last night in the debate in relation to euthanasia, bills like the euthanasia bill will put much greater demand on the need for interpreters. Basically, the opposition will support any action that the government is prepared to take to try to ensure that people across the Northern Territory have access to interpreters. We see that as quite difficult and a medium-term program, but it is important that the government put in place a plan

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whereby, for both Aboriginal languages and overseas languages, the Northern Territory has access to interpreters to assist people in understanding legislation and for court work etc. It is a very important area. How on earth can we say that people have any kind of equity if they cannot even communicate with government when issues arise.

I would like also to place on record my support and acknowledgment of the work done by all the individual ethnic community groups, whether in specialist areas, within their country-of-origin ethnic groups, within their religious groups or in umbrella groups such as the Ethnic Communities Council and the Migrant Resource Centre in Alice Springs. I am aware that the member for Barkly will be talking about developments in the Barkly region. I congratulate the minister on his statement on ethnic affairs. I look forward to working with him in this area over the coming years.

Mr SETTER (Jingili): Mr Speaker, in rising to speak to the minister's statement, I want to say that I believe ethnic communities play a major role in the Northern Territory community. We heard from the minister that overseas-born people make up something like 19% of the total Territory community. The reality is that, if those of ethnic descent are added to those born overseas - and I am really referring to the children of those families - the percentage would be much higher. I think the Northern Territory should be extremely proud of its ethnic mix. I note from the minister's statement that there are some 140 ethnic groups in the Northern Territory. That is a very high figure. I will run through a few of the larger groups, although I mean no offence to any particular community I omit to mention.

The Chinese people may be broken up into a couple of groups. There are the long-standing residents, particularly Darwin Chinese, most of whom belong to the Chung Wah Society. Those families have been here since before the turn of the century. They are all involved in business and other commercial activities in the community. We all know them, and many of us have good friends among those people. There are also the more recent arrivals - for example, the Hong Kong Chinese who came

here in very recent times. Once again, they are all involved in business. The Chinese Timorese form quite a large group of people who have relocated here since about 1975. Some of them have invested a great deal of money in this community and have been extremely successful, and good luck to them. They have their own organisation, called the Chinese Timorese Association, which is located off Dick Ward Drive. I know that, a year or so ago, the Northern Territory government supported the association by means of a grant to assist with the construction of its new clubhouse. I understand that that building is well under way.

The largest ethnic community in Darwin is the Greek community, many of whom are from the island of Kalymnos, and a delightful place it is too. I had the opportunity to visit Kalymnos 5 or 6 years ago, and it is one of the most picturesque islands anywhere. Apart from in the valley where citrus trees are grown, there is hardly a tree on the island. The mountains are bare, stark and rocky, but they have a wonderful beauty about them that is complemented by the wonderful, blue Aegean Sea. It is an island full of history with a wonderful culture. People from mainland Greece are also part of our community. They are represented by the Kalymnian Club and the Greek community hall located in town, adjacent to the Greek church in Cavenagh Street. The Greek school, off Nightcliff Road, has made a considerable contribution by educating Greek and other children in the Greek language, thereby preserving their culture. Something I like very much about these communities is that they tend to try to

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preserve their culture. They teach their children the songs, dances and customs of their country of origin. We see representatives of these communities participating in Darwin festivals, such as the Bougainvillea Festival.

There are the Portuguese Timorese, and the Portuguese and the Timorese. I mention those separately because, as they will tell you, there are separate groupings there. The Portuguese and Timorese Social Club has premises on McMillans Road, and the Northern Territory government has given them assistance over the years, as it has done with the Kalymnian Club and the Greek community. It has wonderful premises there and I must say that I take every opportunity to visit there to enjoy the traditional Timorese dancing and, after that, the rich Portuguese-style music. It is absolutely wonderful. If members ever have the opportunity to visit the Portuguese and Timorese Social Club, I recommend that they avail themselves of that opportunity because they will have a really great night. They are very hospitable people.

There is also the Thai community whose numbers are increasing at quite a rapid rate. A couple of organisations promote the Thai culture. There is the Thai Lao Association, which holds various functions in this community from time to time. The

Thai Ambassador was in Darwin only a week or so ago, and I had the opportunity to meet with and speak to her on a range of issues of mutual interest. I know that she also called on several of our ministers. She expressed particular interest in the railway project and, through the Deputy Chief Minister, I was able to arrange a special briefing for her on that. She saw considerable similarities between that project and what they are attempting to do in Thailand. She told me that the Thai government has budgeted to spend in excess of \$2000m or \$2500m over the next decade or so on new transportation infrastructure in southern Thailand and in Bangkok. That includes a railway from Bangkok to the east along the coast. She believed that there was a potential for technology and engineering exchange because, whilst the countryside is not identical, the problems that need to be addressed are similar. That is an opportunity. At lunchtime today, I was talking to a gentleman who is a partner in an export-oriented company, albeit a small business, who told me that already his company had appointed an agent in Bangkok. It simply goes to show that small business is picking up this opportunity and running with it.

There is also the Buddhist Society. I am quite a regular visitor to the Buddhist Society which is located off Leanyer Drive in the member for Leanyer's electorate. The Buddhist Society is supported by a range of people from South-East Asia, including the Singhalese, the Vietnamese, Laotians, some Chinese and certainly many Thai people. From time to time, I go there at their invitation to witness various ceremonies. I was there less than 2 weeks ago for one of their major ceremonies. They are lovely people. I had the opportunity to listen to the monk who had come here from Melbourne especially for this ceremony. It is a wonderful religion. It is very interesting to visit the Buddhist Society.

The Filipino community is large, albeit that it is broken up into several different associations. Once again, they make a significant contribution. I am aware that the Northern Territory government supported them a year or 2 ago by providing a block of land on Amy Johnson Drive, not very far from the Portuguese and Timorese Social Club. They are in the process of developing a clubhouse and other facilities.

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The Italian community has been established here for a long time. Whilst its numbers are fewer than those in some of the South-East Asian communities, it has an excellent clubhouse in the Marrara Sports Complex across the road from the St Mary's Football Club. There is also a small Spanish community which I understand is quite active. The Indonesian community consists of 400 or 500 people, but it is growing because of increasing interaction and contact between the Northern Territory and areas in the eastern provinces of Indonesia, in particular Kupang, Bali and Ambon.

These people have enriched our society in the Northern Territory enormously. We

are particularly lucky in Darwin because the majority of these folk appear to have settled here. Unfortunately, Alice Springs has missed out to some extent in terms of the variety of ethnic mix. What have these people brought to us? Firstly, they have brought their culture. I came from the kind of Anglo-Saxon Celtic background where I grew up on beef and 3 vegetables, the ABC and the Women's Weekly. I had very little knowledge about any society or culture beyond that. There were a couple of Asian people in the community. One family had a small business selling groceries, fruit and vegetables, and there was a Greek family, or perhaps a Cypriot family, who had a little cafe, but that was it. I am talking about life in north Queensland. In the mid-1950s, we had an enormous influx of Italians who came straight from Rome to work in the canefields. I went through that experience, and it was an enormous cultural shock to us in those days. If you go there today, half the community will be eating spaghetti and other forms of pasta. Those people have added a great deal to our community. They have integrated into society. Their children attend school and people have businesses in the community, such as owning sugar farms and so on.

The other thing it has done for us is to encourage us to learn about their cultures and societies. These people live in our midst and many of us have taken the opportunity to develop an understanding of their cultures. Whilst it is very simple for us, coming as we do from that Anglo-Saxon Celtic background, to understand the culture of, say, the Germans, the French or the Dutch, it is far more difficult for us to come to grips with the cultures of South-East Asia. However, we have been forced to do that because these people are here in our community. Many of us have done it very well. These days, many people speak an Asian language. When I went to school, we learned French or German. These days, young people learn Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, and a number of other languages in the Territory.

I appreciate the way that these communities have gone out of their way to become part of the Northern Territory. We see them involved in the Bougainvillea Festival and various other activities around the Northern Territory. I have noted also that they are hardworking. They are committed and they want to improve their lot. They want to make a better life for their families, and they do it very well. If you went to the CES and asked how many people of ethnic background are unemployed, you would find that there are very few. As a proportion of the total unemployed, they are a very small percentage. The other aspect that has impressed me is the scholastic record of their young people, particularly those from South-East Asia. At any of the high schools or the NTU, you will find that two-thirds of the students in the top 20 have a South-East Asian background. If you want a great experience, visit the markets - the Mindil market on Thursday, the Rapid Creek market on Sunday and the Parap market on Saturday morning. That is where you really see the ethnic mix at work.

This government values greatly the contribution that ethnic people have made to our

community. In recognition of that, the government has a number of programs of support. The minister mentioned that, for some years, we have been spending about \$40 000 to provide accommodation for the Ethnic Communities Council and the Multilingual Broadcasting Council. We provide the Interpreter and Translator Service also. That was mentioned last night during the debate on the Rights of the Terminally Ill Bill. That service is widely used in our hospitals, courts and a variety of other places. The minister mentioned overseas qualifications assessment assistance. Many migrants have professional qualifications but, in the past, they have been unable to take advantage of those qualifications. I was pleased to note that we have a program in place now to assist them.

Considerable funds are directed towards supporting various projects in the ethnic communities. This year, there have been 30 applications for a total of about \$200 000. Whilst they may not obtain all that they are asking for, I am quite sure that this government will go a long way towards satisfying their requests. I support the minister's statement.

Mrs HICKEY (Barkly): Mr Speaker, I will be brief in responding to the minister's statement. Like him, I acknowledge and commend the efforts of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds who contribute enormously to the social, cultural and economic fabric of our lives in the Northern Territory. In saying that, I would like to concentrate my comments on my own community of Tennant Creek and the efforts that have been made there recently by people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

It was not very long ago that the federal Lower House investigation into access and equity issues invited submissions to that committee. Tennant Creek made a somewhat hurried submission. A small group met to talk about the issues that were of importance to them. There were fewer than 20 people at the initial meeting, but they were all from different backgrounds - Filipino, Malaysian, Bosnian, Indian etc. In one way or another, all of these people had experienced, in respect of access to services they require, some of the difficulties inherent in living in small and relatively remote towns such as Tennant Creek.

The outcome of that meeting was a steering committee of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. It worked towards a public meeting that was held last month. As a result, a Multicultural Forum has been formed in Tennant Creek. The forum hopes to access grant-in-aid funds to obtain a part-time worker. By and large, they are very self-reliant people and certainly do not require anybody to hold their hands. However, it will be useful for them to have one person who holds a deal of information about access to programs, services and information that people might require on a range of issues. In my time as the member for Barkly, those that have been raised with me most frequently have been problems relating to the lack of interpreter services, access to information about immigration

and ethnic affairs, and access to face-to-face dialogue with people on counselling issues to do with discrimination, housing and employment.

We have visitors, who are expert in these fields, from various migrant resource groups based in Darwin and Alice Springs but there is nothing like having your own person on the ground who can address the specific issues. I notice that the proportion of our people who are of non-English-speaking background is approximately 7% of Tennant Creek's population. Probably, that is a fair reflection of the situation in the rest of the Territory. From what the minister said, the proportion is about 8% to 9% throughout the Territory so we are not unusual. The problem for us is that we do not have specific services targeted to that particular group. It is diverse, with people from many different backgrounds.

Filipinos constitute the vast majority of these people in Tennant Creek. Their organisation is called the Mabuhay Association which convenes largely for social functions. I have attended one of those and I can say that they are very good. These people support each other very heavily. They were delighted when the first meeting was convened in my office and subsequently formed a multicultural forum because, as they said, in the past, they had been working somewhat in isolation with their own language group. Thus, to share their experiences and ideas with people from other non-English-speaking backgrounds was useful for them. They could compare the difficulties and the challenges that they had had. They could share information about what was available. Certainly, they learnt a great deal from each other. I must say that they are a very entertaining group of people who believe that meetings should not be dry and dull events, but that a little levity should be injected into the proceedings and they do that wherever possible. They aim to provide information, to come together for a common purpose and to have a good time at the same time.

I have spoken previously about some of these issues, but I will rehearse them here because they are of interest to the people in my electorate. I refer to the issues that were raised as being of concern when the initial meeting was held. I note that, the first time I spoke about this, I raised the issue of foreign doctors and their ability to practise in the Northern Territory. I believe that the member for Grotorex said that he may decide to speak about that at some future time. He will be speaking in this debate and I will be interested to hear what he has to say. I have to admit that I need to learn about this issue, and I will be glad to forward his comments to my constituents.

I noted with some interest the minister's comment that there is an Overseas Qualifications Unit in the Northern Territory. Clearly, that unit could be of assistance to people seeking further information in relation to qualifications in their particular

field. There seems to be a difficulty with the recognition of qualifications and accreditation. I was very impressed with the range of qualifications of the people from non-English-speaking backgrounds in Tennant Creek, most of whom are performing what you would have to say are fairly ordinary jobs, such as work in the retailing sector. Certainly, you would imagine, from the qualifications that some of them hold, that they are capable of filling other employment. One of the problems is not only perhaps their lack of recognised qualifications in Australia, but also the number of jobs that are available in their particular fields in a small community. Those people are not immobile and it is usual for them to move around the Territory. They are very loyal to the Territory. Many of them have come from overseas countries to the Northern Territory first. They recognise the great opportunities with which they have been provided

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here. They prefer to remain in the Territory, but they do move around the Territory. Perhaps there are opportunities in some of the larger centres to pursue their particular trade or skill and therefore it is useful for them to have their qualifications recognised.

Discrimination was a concern among some of the people at the meeting - mostly women, who were caught in something of a bind in a small community. While they recognised that there had been some discrimination exercised against them in respect of access to employment, they were reluctant to raise these issues with the Anti-Discrimination Commission for fear of more subtle reprisals against themselves or their communities. At least, a visit from an officer of the Anti-Discrimination Commission was useful in letting them know what their rights are and what the law imposes on Territorians in terms of fair and equitable treatment. Certainly, it raised their consciousness. I hope that employees of employers who have any tendency to discriminate when they are seeking people for employment will take due note of the information and of the law regarding discrimination against people for whatever reason.

Access to interpreter services is a constant difficulty in a small community. I am glad to note that effort is being expended in that regard in the Northern Territory. When we look at the bill that was passed last night, we see the urgent need for highly-qualified and accredited interpreters in extreme circumstances such as terminal illness, where doctors must ensure that patients understand very clearly what is being spelt out to them.

Although people can access English language courses fairly readily in the larger centres, at the moment we do not have any courses in Tennant Creek. That issue may have been addressed through the Multicultural Forum also. People within that group intend now to begin lobbying for better services. Because there is no local

focus for accessing information on services available to people of non-English-speaking background, an organisation needs to be established such as an ethnic communities council or a migrant resource centre. The group that has been formed in Tennant Creek will apply for funding in that regard. At the moment, the town is serviced by twice-yearly visits from a grant-in-aid worker in Alice Springs but, clearly, it would be useful to have our own person on the ground, albeit part-time.

The Northern Territory Migrants Advisory Committee lacked a representative from Tennant Creek. As a result of the meeting and talks with the appropriate authorities, I gather that that matter has been addressed now. In Tennant Creek, I believe things are set fair for people of non-English-speaking backgrounds to access services and to become better informed about what is available to them. I noticed with some interest that, as a result of the first forum, there have been a number of visits from different authorities that are interested in issues relating to immigration, language, and access and equity. I was interested also to note that, as a result of the submission from our office, we received copies of the printed submissions to the inquiry by the House of Representatives. Ours was the only submission from the Northern Territory, and that was quite a surprise to me. I must admit that ours was rather a hurried affair. If another opportunity arises to make such a submission, we will be in a much better position to give a more comprehensive view of the situation in my region.

Since the 1930s, mining has attracted many people from European backgrounds and, subsequently from Asian backgrounds, to the region. We have always had an interesting and very vital mix of nationalities in Tennant Creek. The town has been easily able to accommodate those people and always has been very pleased to see a mix of people. They

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come and go, of course, as people do in small communities. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the community is enriched as those people move through it and make their contribution. They are largely very family-minded people who involve themselves with community organisations. They are very supportive of their children's education and they participate very actively in school councils and fund-raising for schools and churches. They form a big part of the cultural and social scene in the community.

Through the Multicultural Forum, they will draw attention to their needs and problems, and will be able to enlist the support of others in the town who may not have been aware of some of their difficulties. Interest has spread beyond people of non-English-speaking backgrounds. Other people attended the forum, Australian-born or from other English-speaking backgrounds. They were pleased to be a part of the forum and enjoy the entertainment which people provided at that first meeting.

Many of them told me afterwards that they had not realised what a rich community they lived in and how much these people contribute to the fabric of our society.

While Tennant Creek people lack immediate access to some of the services that the minister mentioned, we are well on the way to a better state of affairs in our town. I commend the minister for the efforts that have been made by this government to improve access for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds to services, and for the funding that it provides to ensure that these services are available throughout the Territory.

The minister mentioned the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Office of Aboriginal Development as contributing to services for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. I agree that the Office of Aboriginal Development is useful in that regard. It is a great pity that the government resisted for so many years a move to provide a specific office or ministry. It was evident from the beginning of self-government that that was very much needed, but the government chose to ignore the need for a long time. However, an office is in place now. I hope that its services and its staffing will not be eroded, and that it continues to function as a link between government departments and communities because I believe we lost something when the Office of Community Development was dismantled and the mainstreaming concept implemented. That did nothing for Aboriginal communities. In fact, I believe it set them back many years. I suppose that OAD is a move in the right direction, and I hope that office is not dismantled as the Office of Community Development was before it.

Having said that, today's statement concentrated on the matter of services and work done in the ethnic community. By and large, we understand the 'ethnic community' to be people from non-English-speaking backgrounds who were born overseas. I again commend the minister on his statement. I add my acknowledgment and appreciation of the work and the richness that that group of people contributes to Territory life.

Dr LIM (Greatorrex): Mr Speaker, I rise to speak briefly in support of the statement by the minister. I commend the minister and his department for the work that has been done and the encouragement given to ethnic communities in the Territory. The minister revealed that 19% of Territorians were born overseas and some 50% of these were born in non-English-speaking countries. I am one of them in that I immigrated to Australia some 32 years ago.

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The Territory is a unique place in this country, with some 140 ethnic groups living harmoniously together. In particular, the Chinese population makes up a very sizeable section of the ethnic community. Although all members would know that

some Chinese are now sixth or seventh generation Territorians, most of the ethnic population has maintained links with their ancestral homelands. These links have provided Territory businesses and opportunities to develop trade. They have provided a welcoming environment for overseas tourists, sportsmen and the like. In fact, their goodwill and assistance ensured the success of the Arafura Games. I was unable to witness the opening and the conduct of the games about 2 weeks ago but, from what I have heard, the ethnic community contributed to its success in no small way.

Early this year, I attended the re-establishment of the Alice Springs Office of Ethnic Affairs. The office provides facilities and services for ethnic people in central Australia. It has provided a home for the Ethnic Communities Council at the Centrepont Building in the central business district of Alice Springs. Through the facilities in this office, it also enables the Adult Migrant English Centre to provide language lessons to people of non-English-speaking origin. I must report that the AMEC works well. The improvement of spoken English among my non-English-speaking patients is testimony to its success. Many years ago, I was Chairman of the Migrant Resource Centre, a federally-funded organisation. Through that position, I was involved intimately with the office and also the ECC. The Migrant Resource Centre complements the work done by the Office of Ethnic Affairs.

The Northern Territory Interpreter and Translator Service has been a very useful facility. Unlike the federal TIS program, the Northern Territory Interpreter and Translator Service provides free face-to-face interpretation. Some members in this Chamber have often said that I need an interpreter so that they can understand what I have to say.

Mrs Padgham-Purich: I can understand you. You are okay.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Maybe I do not need to ring for an interpreter at this point.

The interpreter service is very useful and particularly important where technical matters are concerned. By that, I refer to the importance of obtaining accurate information for purposes such as in health care or engineering projects. It is obvious to all that information exchanged between a patient or client and the professional has to be accurate, and an interpreter with adequate skills is essential in these instances.

The minister described to us the role of the Overseas Qualifications Unit. On immigrating to the Northern Territory or anywhere else in Australia, many overseas-qualified people come with some expectation that their overseas qualifications will be recognised for employment purposes. In fact, they win points in the immigration assessment system for particular professions. Unfortunately, many national professional bodies do not recognise qualifications obtained overseas. This was the issue that the member for Barkly discussed in her adjournment speech last week

and again today. I did say that I would try to enlighten her on this matter.

I will confine my comments to medical qualifications, a matter I know something about. Many an overseas doctor has been frustrated in this regard. Overseas qualifications are partly recognised. The member for Barkly complained that foreign doctors are permitted to practise

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in Tennant Creek, but not elsewhere in Australia as if we are sending second-rate doctors to Tennant Creek. The member knows full well that the professional bodies that regulate the educational qualifications must be satisfied that an overseas qualification is of a standard that is commensurate with that in Australia.

Another aspect is the cultural appropriateness of the training. Doctors trained and working overseas would see patients with different social and medical expectations. Perhaps I can give an example. I have a cousin who works in Singapore and sees between 60 and 80 patients a day. That works out at some 8 to 10 patients per hour. How she manages to do that is beyond me because, when I have seen 25 to 30 patients, I feel absolutely exhausted and it would have taken me at least 10 hours to perform that comparatively small workload. Obviously, the cultural expectations of those patients are different and the communication between doctor and patient would be different. If my cousin were to come to Australia to work, and if she were to work in the same style as she had worked in Singapore, she would have caused considerable harm to the patients. She would not have communicated adequately to patients and she would not have had enough time even to listen to them. Thus, it is important that doctors who want to work in Australia have some knowledge of our cultural expectations. Some of these doctors come to Australia with very high qualifications. Some are heart and brain surgeons, but they may not have the language skills that are so necessary in the delivery of health care in Australia. The member for Barkly's reference to the Bosnian dentist who could not speak any English was a good example of the problem.

The Australian Medical Council has placed stringent requirements on overseas-trained doctors before they are permitted to practise without supervision. These requirements are in English language, social skills, and demonstrated theoretical and clinical skills. To help overseas doctors attain these skills, supervised jobs within public hospitals are provided. These doctors are then given 2 to 3 years to learn and then pass theoretical, oral and clinical examinations. These retraining procedures are in place to ensure that doctors who practise in the public domain are trained satisfactorily to the standards set by the AMC. Essentially, this is to ensure that the Australian public is provided with the best doctors available. The Office of Ethnic Affairs has set up a complementary program whereby foreign doctors are provided

with extra contact with general practitioners so that they can absorb the techniques of patient care that we use in the Territory.

In closing, I congratulate the minister on his statement. I met with many of the leaders of the ethnic community over lunch today. My early discussions with Daryl Chin will enable me to proceed further with my research in relation to the Chinese influence in central Australia. Members may recall that, in my maiden speech, I mentioned a Chinaman who left Darwin to go to Alice Springs in 1896 or 1897 to mine gold at Arltunga. For some reason, he was not permitted to do that and went into market gardening instead. I could not find the name of this man, nor any other history apart from that single reference. Hopefully, I will be able to obtain some information from Daryl Chin.

The ethnic communities give the Territory a very refreshing and different perspective. They demonstrate to our neighbours, north and elsewhere, that we are a diverse community which values its cultural and ethnic mix.

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Mr STONE (Ethnic Affairs): Mr Speaker, in reply, I wish to thank members for their contributions to this important statement on ethnic affairs in the Northern Territory. Ethnic groups are a very important component of our community, and have given us a very culturally-diverse society of which we are all very proud. In particular, I congratulate the member for Grotorex on his contribution. He is a migrant who came to this country as a young man, subsequently graduated from medical school and now has the distinction of being the first overseas-born Chinese Australian citizen to have achieved election to a Lower House in Australia, and that has been achieved in the Northern Territory. I thank also the members for Barkly, Wanguri and Jingili for their contributions. Rest assured that one of the greatest strengths of the Northern Territory community is our rich cultural diversity, and the Northern Territory government remains absolutely committed to resourcing those communities and supporting them in every way possible.

Motion agreed to.

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