



LMA President, Samier Dandan

Statement Regarding Minister Dutton's Comments

A 71-75 Wangee Rd,
Lakemba NSW 2195
P (02) 9750 6833
E info@lma.org.au
W lma.org.au

The comments and accusations made by the Immigration and Border Protection Minister, Mr Peter Dutton, is another example of the constant media scrutiny and dog whistle politics that the Australian Lebanese Muslim community has had to endure since we first arrived in the 70s and 80s.

Minister Dutton is just another in a long line of politicians and public personalities to question our community, to question our loyalties and our contributions, and to reduce us as a community to a stereotype, to a caricature.

By linking the immigration of the Lebanese Community in the 70s to the issue of foreign fighters, Minister Dutton has essentially outlined how he sees Lebanese Muslims, and his comments reflect on a government unable to embrace multiculturalism and indigenous rights instead revealing its toxic assimilationist nationalist agenda.

Let us not beat around the bush here – what Dutton said was racist. What he implied was racist, and the lack of outrage in Parliament reflects on the racism underscoring much of how we talk about minorities in Australia.

And we here at the LMA refuse to buy into this rhetoric and this circus. We will not be party to this, this should not be about proving ourselves to wider Australia. We already have and we are tired of doing so. We are sick and tired of having every element of our lives dissected and questioned, and we refuse to continue doing so at Dutton's behest.

This willingness by government to manipulate and exploit bigotry for political advantage is an insult to not only our community, but is an insult to Australia's intellect, we will not be fooled nor bullied by opportunists willing to mistreat entire communities for political gain.



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We share the concern for the safety of all Australians, however this is a shocking and twisted way to paint an entire community. Minister Dutton has taken a broad brush and downgraded them and their contributions, their very value as humans, to the violence associated with foreign fighters. The same community that fled in the 70s and 80s, fled from the very same violence Minister Dutton is seeking to protect Australia from.

We hope this does not reflect a possible failure on Minister Dutton's part in understanding the root causes of the foreign fighter's issue, essentially making it about a single culture and community. This is a complex issue with a whole host of differing root causes including socio-economic status, political disempowerment and racial discrimination, none of which has anything to do with any one culture entering Australia. Instead of forging a new Australian identity that is inclusive of all those who are here, we are blatantly seeking to divide and create a racially and ethnically intolerant Australia.

However, what is at the centre of this discussion is a very simple political tactic – shifting blame. Dutton doesn't want us speaking about his abject failure to protect the lives and welfare of asylum seekers, and does not want us to continue the discussion on the disgusting state of our offshore processing centres on Manus and Nauru.

Let us not buy into his narrative of a government blameless for the current state we find ourselves in. Nor should we let them off the hook for the shocking cruelty of their immigration policies.

The LMA calls upon the government as a whole, as well as the opposition, to hold Minister Dutton to account and to question themselves on the racism they enable with their silence. Australia must show its moral condemnation of those elected, in order to protect the fragile cohesion we have.

Our Community, Our Future