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SPEECH

<p>Date Tuesday, 21 August 2018 Page 61 Questioner Speaker Faruqi, Sen Mehreen</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (17:00): Good evening. Assalamoalikum. We are gathered here today on stolen land. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. We must recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. All Australians, whether they were born here or have come from somewhere else, have an obligation to remember: this land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

First Nations people still face the worst of racism and discrimination. We must commit and recommit to ending this, not on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but alongside them. There is still a reluctance among many to acknowledge that we are a settler colonial society. It is a simple fact. Australia is a nation built on the invasion and colonisation of sovereign nations. It surprises me and saddens me that this reality is still denied, often vehemently. It is my belief that there must be a First Nations voice enshrined in the Constitution and a truth telling about history. A makarrata commission must oversee treaties with First Nations peoples that recognise the continuing occupation, acknowledge their sovereignty and respect their right to self-determination. The African-American writer James Baldwin once said:

... the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

Our past directly informs our future. Without truth, reconciliation and sovereignty for First Nations people, our past remains a gaping wound.

Thank you to everyone who is here with me this evening, particularly those of you who have travelled from Sydney and New South Wales and my Greens colleagues from the New South Wales parliament. I know that so many others are watching from all corners of Australia and Pakistan as I make my first speech in the Senate. Your friendship and your love is the reason I am here. I am overwhelmed and humbled by the support I've received from the community here and across our borders. Thank you. I will try my hardest to meet your expectations. I can only do my work because of an incredible team of dedicated people in my office. Matt, Maliha, Belinda, Max and Emma, your trust in me and your commitment to our work are really appreciated.

A very special thank you to my sister-in-law, Naila, and her children, Nida and Ahmed, who have come all the way from Pakistan. My brother-in-law, Obaid, flew in from the US especially for this occasion. Thank you for being here with me and for your love ever since we became part of each other's families.

Omar, Osman and Aisha, my dearest husband and children, are here with me as they have been at every step of this journey. I don't think there is a way to really thank you for what you have given me: unconditional love, much-needed constructive criticism—most of the time!—and bucketloads of encouragement always.

I'm so grateful for the trust Greens members have placed in me. I'm so immensely proud of the Australian Greens—our dream team here in parliament and the New South Wales Greens, in particular. I am motivated every single day by the thousands of members and supporters. In 2003, millions watched as Senators Bob Brown and Kerry Nettle confronted George Bush in this very building as he spun his lies about the war in Iraq. That courage is the reason I joined the Greens.

I come into the Senate with big shoes to fill. Senator Rhiannon has been a leading light for our party. Her work to defend public services, to combat the corrosive effect of corporate donations, to protect animals and to end live exports will be numbered among her many lasting legacies. It is now my job to continue the work of our movement in this place and in the community. This is not a job I ever expected to have when I arrived as a migrant in Sydney over 26 years ago.

It was early 1992. Paul Keating was the Prime Minister. The economy was in the 'recession we had to have', and Australia and New Zealand were about to host their first ever Cricket World Cup—which Pakistan won,

by the way! Staring out over the tarmac of Kingsford Smith Airport, I could not help but feel a combination of excitement and anticipation for what the future held for my husband, my one-year-old son and me. My father came to Australia in 1957 to study on a scholarship, and I grew up seeing his photos and movies of Sydney, with its glimmering harbour, the Opera House and the beautiful surrounding natural environment. It was a place of wonder and opportunity for me. I still marvel at the Harbour Bridge as a feat of engineering, but that's just the nerdy civil engineer in me.

While I did and still do feel great affection for my country of birth, I did not leave Pakistan for superficial or insignificant reasons. I wasn't able to reconcile an entrenched class divide between the rich and the poor, the women and the men, and the elite and the workers. The country I came to, in many ways, felt like an egalitarian society where ordinary people tended to be treated with dignity and respect. But, the more I learned about Australia, the more I was troubled by our treatment of Aboriginal people.

When we arrived here, public services were well funded to help migrants find their feet. We could not have survived those early days without it. Things were definitely not perfect. My husband, Omar, drove cabs because no-one would hire a fully qualified and experienced engineer from Pakistan. The Mehreen of 1992 started studying for a masters in engineering with big hoops and big hair and could never have imagined that one day she would be a senator for New South Wales.

So we began our lives in Australia, and let me tell you: it's been quite the ride since I first looked over the tarmac at Sydney Airport all those years ago. I worked in regional New South Wales and in Sydney in the public and private sectors as an engineer, consultant, teacher and academic. From Mosman Council and the classrooms of the University of New South Wales to Port Macquarie on the New South Wales North Coast, I rolled up my sleeves and did the practical work of enhancing and conserving our natural resources.

In 2013 I took that work to the upper house of the New South Wales parliament, which is sometimes said to be the most powerful legislative chamber in the country. That is a gentle warning! I bring to this chamber my track record on shaking things up and shifting the agenda on issues as diverse as decriminalising abortion, drug law reform, LGBTIQI rights, the right to die with dignity and protecting our environment. We held the conservative government and the weak-willed opposition in New South Wales to account. I intend to do the same here.

While I did feel welcomed when we arrived here, migrants coming to our shores today would not be able to say the same. The last 26 years have seen governments erode support for newcomers as bigotry and xenophobia have been allowed to flourish. A culture of online harassment, bullying and toxicity now targets everyone who is not a straight white man. Along with many others, I have been at the receiving end of thousands of racist and sexist messages on social media, on the phone and as handwritten letters. Scratch the surface of those vile messages and you see a common theme: attacks on people of colour and women.

The existence of racism, sexism and other discrimination is not new, but what has changed is its legitimisation, normalisation and encouragement in the media and in politics. Political leaders, in addition to their old habit of racist dog-whistling, are now comfortable outright fanning the flames of racial conflict. This month alone, Sky News handed its megaphone to a neo-Nazi with the most abhorrent of views. The coalition set upon young Africans in Melbourne for political gain, and this house heard calls for a ban on Muslim migration and a return to the White Australia policy.

It's all well and good for politicians to condemn the most blatant racism, but we cannot allow them to use these public displays of solidarity as cover for their own role in creating and fanning racial divisions. You can't condemn racism and then, in a warm glow of self-congratulation, allow deep-rooted structures of discrimination to remain in access to health care and public services, in our prisons and justice system and in our immigration system. You cannot ignore the prevalence of 'resume racism' and the casual racism our children face as they grow up. You cannot condemn racism and then use dog-whistling and race-baiting as an electoral tactic.

The so-called debate on population shows this hypocrisy all too clearly, where blame for failures to plan for the future and to invest in infrastructure is laid squarely at the feet of migrants, instead of governments, which have been preoccupied with privatising the hell out of everything. We might shake our heads when migrants are said to have the amazing ability to simultaneously sit on welfare our whole lives and also take up all the jobs that 'true Aussies' are entitled to, but far too little attention is paid to the implications this political racism has for our lives, our mental health, and our families. We cannot be expected to ignore sustained abuse or be told to hide the fear and gut-wrenching pain that it causes. If we receive death threats and speak out about it, as my son did

earlier this month, we are told we have a victim mentality and this is all part and parcel of public life. Well, we will not be silenced. We will speak out.

Bol, ke labh aazaad hain tere

Bol, zubaan ab tak teri hai

Tera sutwaan jism hai tera

Bol, ke jaan ab tak teri hai

The essence of this verse in Urdu is the duty to resist, to speak up and to speak the truth, no matter our circumstances. This was written by Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz while he was in prison. He was a member of the Communist Party and wrote on the plight of workers and on human rights abuses across the world, from apartheid in South Africa to human rights violations in Palestine.

This verse is a good reminder of our true purpose for being here. Being a senator gives us the immense privilege of having a platform, and I intend to use it, just like my colleagues in the Greens, to speak out against injustice and amplify voices that seek justice, whoever or wherever they are.

The reality is that my presence in the Senate is an affront to some. They are offended that people of colour, and Muslims, have the audacity to not only exist but to open our mouths and join the public debate. Some politicians call us cockroaches. Some say we are a disease against which Australia needs vaccination. Some, if they had their way, would ban us from making Australia our home. So it is with great pride that I stand here before you, unapologetically—a brown, Muslim, migrant, feminist woman, and a Greens senator. I say 'unapologetically', because if there is one thing people with stories like mine are asked to do constantly, it is to apologise for our presence, because we are not quiet enough, not respectful enough, not thankful enough, not Australian enough.

For some, we will never be Australian enough. But how can I be Australian enough? Do I need to point to my love of cricket, my career in the public service, or my husband's role as a major in the Army Reserve? Instead of being accepted, because this is our home, we are asked to apologise for every action of someone who looks like us. We are subject to rules that white people never are. We don't have the luxury of mistakes or of slipping up, because as soon as we do we become a case study to validate existing stereotypes. We don't have the luxury of individuality, because we are considered a monolithic mass which operates as one. Even our responses to racism are policed. To even talk about racism lands you a full-page attack piece in *The Daily Telegraph*. These are uncomfortable truths for many people, and there is sometimes an inexplicable disbelief that racism exists in Australia, but not talking about it because it might make people uncomfortable creates the very silence that allows institutional racism to persist. Calling out racism is really not about making ourselves feel better or making others feel worse or even looking for sympathy. It is a statement of reality, of what is happening every day, and that all is not okay.

Our country cannot be the place most of us want it to be while the threat of abuse continues to discourage people from participating in politics. We cannot be a country for all Australians while communities like the Sudanese are used as political footballs. We all need to do much better at including historically silenced voices. My presence here and that of a handful of other people of colour is just the beginning of the process, not the end. I reaffirm my commitment to stamping out racism and sexism in every way I can. Let us have the courage though to acknowledge it wherever it happens.

To those who want me to eff off back to where I came from, I say: Mazarrat chahiti hoon, magar afsoas nahin. Yeh maira ghar hai aur mein kaheen naheen jaon gee. Sorry, not sorry! This is my home, and I'm not going anywhere. I want us to be the best we can be, to build a society where all of us matter. To do this, we must set aside narrow electorally focused agendas. People have warned me about the Canberra bubble, where politicians are disconnected from the reality of what communities want and need, and become singularly focused on individual power or winning the next election. We've seen today the government indulging in the most narcissistic of political power plays, all while bushfires are burning across New South Wales in winter and 100 per cent of the state is in drought.

We face wicked problems that demand radical solutions. We must reject simplistic solutions and tackle the root causes. We cannot talk about millions of displaced people and those seeking asylum in Australia without acknowledging the role we've played in the global imperial war machine. We cannot tackle climate change or

the waste crisis without addressing rampant overconsumption and abuse of natural resources. We cannot resolve income inequality without addressing the excesses of capitalism and neoliberalism. We cannot lift people out of poverty without asking why corporations have free rein to rake in ever-growing profits at the expense of people and the planet.

Children are dying in offshore camps. Young people are juggling multiple jobs just to survive, and our environment remains on the brink of irreversible damage. We are a rich country, but so many are being left behind. People are right to say that we need big, bold, fearless ideas. We can make sure wealth isn't concentrated in the deep pockets of the rich. We can give each child and young person the promise of free education. We can make sure that the sick and elderly get the care they deserve. Nature has intrinsic value. It is not just a commodity to be used and abused. Let's enshrine the rights of nature in law to protect Australia's natural wonders, like the Great Barrier Reef, the Great Artesian Basin and the Murray-Darling system, from greedy exploitation. Let's remove money from politics, end the revolving door of politicians and lobbyists, and place people at the very heart of decisions. I know that creating change is risky business, but the risk of challenging entrenched norms and values is well worth the reward—a more caring, kind and compassionate world. My role as a senator is as much about what I will do outside this place as it is about the business conducted in this chamber. We should be under no illusions that we can achieve all the change Australia requires from in here. It is people, not parliaments, who will lead the way in sparking our political imagination and creating radical change. It is activists who work tirelessly for their causes. It is community members, neighbours, teachers, workers and students who inspire me every day.

Above all, it is through talking and listening to each other that change will come—conversations that start community movements to win equal marriage, where strangers call out racism on public transport, where neighbours encourage each other to take action to protect their local environment and where we reach across the divides of politics and political differences to build an understanding that we are all in this together. These conversations—the slow, messy, sometimes difficult but indelibly human process—may offend the sensibilities of some modern political apparatchiks. But the clinical purity of data analysis, ad targeting and corporate fundraising can be no replacement for genuine deliberation, discussion and debate with each other, both in here and out there. That will create the appetite and the momentum for the change our country needs.

In these conversations we find a vision of Australia's future, a vision for all of us. I see an Australia that looks beyond its borders, not as a nation hungry for resources and cheap goods, not as a nation suspicious or fearful of others and not as an ally of a war machine but as a friend of people who are fighting oppression, marginalisation and injustices wherever they may be. We look beyond our borders as a proponent of democracy and human rights everywhere, not just where it is politically expedient. We look to international peace, to justice in Palestine, to welcoming refugees.

I see an unashamedly feminist country where the patriarchy is dismantled, where access to abortion is unambiguously legal, where the safety of women is of the utmost importance and violence against women is confronted as the crisis that it is. But gender equality is not just going to happen. Equality must be the law, and corporations that refuse to pay women the same as they would a man should be penalised.

I have the privilege of being the 100th woman to sit in the Senate. I'm thankful to the 99 others who forged this path. But I would not be standing here in front of you were it not for the exceptional women in my life—my mother, who is generous, kind and trusting, who still shows me how to break the mould; my aunt, the fiercely independent writer, poet and feminist who taught me to speak out for women's rights; my mother-in-law, who did what had to be done, always without seeking any recognition or reward; and my grandmother, who gave me the freedom to play cricket and fly kites to my heart's content.

Women like activist Angela Davis and biologist Rachel Carson inspire me. Sadly, many other women who have been at the forefront of social movements rarely receive the historical recognition given to their male peers.

I want to see an Australia where the voices of Indigenous women, trans women and women of colour are heard, not silenced, an Australia where the fruit of our labour is enjoyed, not exploited, where workers have power, unions are strong and no-one has to work four jobs just to make ends meet.

I see a place where climate change is more than a political football, where the economy is working for the people and the environment, where the environment is seen not as diametrically opposed to the economy but as inextricably linked with it. A thriving environment is essential for our wellbeing.

I see a society that cares for animals, where greyhounds like my beautiful Cosmo are safe and happy in homes instead of being pushed to their limits and killed on racetracks for gambling, a society where we would never tolerate the inhumanity of live exports or factory farming and where our native species are safe from the threat of extinction.

The Greens see an Australia embracing new ideas, knowing full well that old approaches have failed us.

Those who know me know—and perhaps those who don't know me so well will soon find out—that I'm not backwards in coming forward. I learned very early in life to fight hard to change what I knew to be unfair, from tussles with my mother to be allowed to do the same things as my brothers did to studying civil engineering in a man's world. Using this same determination, I made a new life in Australia and pushed boundaries in the New South Wales parliament. I bring this determination and a troublemaking streak with me to the Senate. We cannot fiddle around the edges and somehow hope that the tide will turn. We can build a future for each and every one of us, no matter where we come from and no matter the colour of our skin, our religion, our gender or sexuality, our bank balance or our postcode. I hope I can make you proud.