

MEDIA RELEASE

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VMC WELCOMES NEW VOICES AND NEW IDEAS

The voice of Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities takes on a new tone this month, with the appointment of three new commissioners to the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC).

VMC Chairperson Chin Tan paid tribute to the commissioners who were leaving the role, and welcomed the three new commissioners.

"It is an honour and a privilege to represent Victoria's diverse communities, and we work with them to ensure that Victoria continues to be a place that values our differences," Mr Tan said.

"Celebrating that diversity, and addressing the issues it can bring, the commissioners of the VMC play a vital role in promoting harmony and connection to make Victoria a strong multicultural state.

"I thank the three outgoing commissioners - Yasser Soliman, Phillip Bain and Yasmin Hassan - for their dedication and look forward to maintaining strong and positive relationships with them as they continue their work to promote multiculturalism in other roles.

"The three new commissioners – Abeselom Nega, Maryum Aziz Chaudhry and youth representative Safa Almarhoun – were chosen from more than 70 strong candidates and they have big shoes to fill, but I am confident they'll do an outstanding job.

"Our new commissioners will bring many new talents to the task of making Victoria a prosperous multicultural state, and their skills will be ably complemented by the knowledge and experience of the continuing commissioners," he said.

Mr Tan said that Victorians come from more than 200 different countries, speak more than 260 languages and follow one of 135 different faiths, making Victoria one of the most multicultural places in the world.

"There's always more work to be done in the name of peace and harmony, and I look forward to doing that in the coming years with the commissioners" he said.

The VMC is an independent authority that links Victoria's diverse communities and the Victorian Government.

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Chairperson – Mr Chin Tan

Current term – 1 September 2011 to 30 August 2015

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Mr Chin Tan is the Chairperson of the VMC and has been a commissioner under three Victorian governments.

Mr Tan was a practising lawyer, and had an active engagement in the business community including several roles with local chambers of commerce and professional business associations and local governments. He also has close connections and involvement with multicultural community organisations and social groups. Currently, he is the co-chair of the Police and Community Multicultural Advisory Committee and a member of the Ministerial Advisory Council for a Multilingual and Multicultural Victoria.

Deputy Chairperson – Mr Ross (Spiro) Alatsas

Current term – 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2017

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Mr Ross Alatsas has been the General Manager of the Greek Media Group since 1997 while also being involved in various committees and advisory councils promoting Victoria's cultural diversity, including establishing the first 24 hour Chinese Radio – 3CW. He has coordinated and raised funds for many community service organisations and victims of natural disasters.

***Commissioner – Miss Safa Almarhoun**

Current term - 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2015

Ms Safa Almarhoun is the Youth Commissioner with broad experience in the multicultural community. She has been involved in a number of programs and projects with the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition, represented the United Arab Emirates at the Global Young Leaders Conference in Vienna, as well as being part of the ASEAN Committee Model UN Conference at the Australian National University.

In 2013 she was an intern at the UN Association of Australia National Conference in Canberra and was a panelist for the Status of Women Network Roundtable.

***Commissioner – Ms Maryum Aziz Chaudhry**

Current appointment term - 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2015

Ms Maryum Chaudhry is the Vice-President of Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and CARE With ME. Her commitment to multiculturalism is demonstrated in her local and international representation at the 6th Regional Interfaith Dialogue Conference, exchange programs to Malaysia and Indonesia, and as a member of many multifaith advisory committees. She is the Chair of ICV Office for Women and an AFL Multicultural Community Ambassador.

Commissioner – Dr Teresa De Fazio

Current term – 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2017

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Dr Teresa De Fazio has extensive experience in the fields of languages, cross cultural communication, leadership, teacher education and intercultural education with many publications to her name. She has worked on various initiatives with organisations such as the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Federation of Ethnic Schools Association and the Western Region of General Practitioners Association. She has also lead a number of different programs for international students and migrants and has, herself, studied both overseas and in Australia.

Commissioner – Ms Elizabeth Drozd

Current term – 1 September 2011 to 30 August 2015

First appointed – 18 November 2008

Ms Elizabeth Drozd has considerable experience in the not-for-profit community services sector and local government, showing dedication to issues affecting multicultural communities, particularly in the area of migrant and refugee settlement as well as access and equity. Ms Drozd is currently the CEO of Australian Multicultural Community Services, Board Director of Care Connect and a Chairperson of a charitable foundation for the Rotary Club of Footscray.

Commissioner – Ms Marion Lau

Current term – 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2015

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Ms Marion Lau has demonstrated strong advocacy skills to support the strengthening of Victoria's culturally diverse community generally. She has professional experience working for government in the area of health and ageing and is currently the Deputy Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria and a member of the Victorian Multicultural Business Ministerial Council and the Emergency Services Telecommunication Authority (ESTA).

Commissioner – Mr Grahame Leonard

Current term – 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2017

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Mr Grahame J Leonard AM has been actively involved with Victoria's diverse faith and ethnic communities for some 20 years, including the roles of Chairperson of the human rights organisation B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission, President of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Grahame is also a volunteer director and former honorary CEO of the Australian chapter of the global anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International,.

Mr Leonard has experience in the field of interpreting and translating as a board member of the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service (VITS). He is a lawyer, chartered accountant and professional director.

Commissioner – Ms Jenny Matic

Current term – 1 September 2011 to 30 August 2015

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Ms Jenny Matic is highly regarded in the multicultural sector and known for her work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. She has extensive experience working within government as well as serving on boards both in the public health sector and the community.

Commissioner – Mr Huseyin Mustafa

Current term – 1 September 2011 to 30 August 2015

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Mr Huseyin Mustafa is presently the President of the Australian Turkish Business Council and a senior executive with a leading financial services provider as well as being an active supporter of community based initiatives in Australia. Mr Mustafa is a Fellow of the National Institute of Public Accountants, holds a number of business diplomas including a Post Graduate Diploma in Financial Services Management and Masters of Management.

***Commissioner – Mr Abeselom Nega**

Current term - 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2015

Mr Abeselom Nega is the CEO of iEmpower, an organisation dedicated to providing services to young people from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds. He has also held positions with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, the Federation of African Communities Council and the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters.

Commissioner – Mr Chidambaram Srinivasan

Current term – 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2017

First appointed – 1 September 2011

Mr Chidambaram Srinivasan (known as 'Srini'), has worked in the IT industry in Australia, India, Japan and USA for more than 32 years. He brings a variety of skills, empathy, knowledge and experience in the areas of technology, community and business (including small business) as well as volunteering for a charity. He has successfully worked in cross-cultural business and social contexts, thanks to his proficiency in multiple languages including English, Tamil, Japanese, Hindi, Bengali and Sanskrit. He has been a long standing supporter of cultural activities in the community.

*denotes new commissioner.