

## INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

### *Statement*

**HON ROSIE SAHANNA (Mining and Pastoral)** [9.45 pm]: Some may say that today is Harmony Day but I prefer to call it what it is and what it should be today. Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This internationally recognised day acknowledges the systemic harm that racism causes to people around the world every day. It is a day for all of us to talk about racism and what should be done to eliminate racial discrimination. Not everyone is comfortable with talking about racism, hence the need for calling today Harmony Day. Harmony Day aims to recognise diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism. All these values are important and should absolutely be acknowledged and celebrated, but removing the word “racism” from this day in particular may also be removing direct conversations about racism. I believe there needs to be more conversation about racism, especially in Australia. Let us not use positive words such as “harmony” to put any sort of positive spin on what is fundamentally a very painful reality for so many of us. With a focus on Australia, we are still so far from eliminating racial discrimination. In our country racism in our communities is widespread against people of many demographics, but especially against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I call on a recent example. In the same month as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination there was an incident of racial abuse towards Aboriginal Australian athlete Latrell Mitchell. Latrell was representing his NRL team, the Sydney Rabbitohs, when he was subjected to a racial slur as he left the field at halftime. The spectator who directed that racist comment at Latrell was 14 years old—yes, a 14-year-old yelled a racist comment at an Aboriginal athlete while he was representing his team in a national Australian sport. Schoolchildren around Australia will be wearing orange this week; likewise, we here today are wearing some sort of orange that reflects the spirit of Harmony Week, but earlier this month that 14-year-old attended the NRL match and thought it appropriate to yell a racist slur at an Aboriginal athlete. This is why we need to have the conversation in our schools and with each other. This is why we need to acknowledge today for what it is, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, because that is the objective; that is the goal. How can we achieve harmony in Australia if we do not achieve the objective of eliminating racial discrimination in our society?

The AFL Players Association released the *Insights and impact report* at the end of last year. Of the 92 AFL players who identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person or as a person of colour, almost one-third reported having experienced racism while listed as an AFL player. One-third of players who identified in this demographic has experienced racism while representing their teams. Of those respondents, only 17 per cent felt that their complaints were dealt with to their satisfaction. My examples today are within the sporting industries of Australia, but it must be acknowledged that there is racism in Australian sport because there is racism in Australia. Sixty per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people surveyed in the 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer reported experiencing at least one form of racism in the past six months. Fifty-seven per cent of Aboriginal people and 47 per cent of non-Aboriginal Australians believe that Australia is a racist country.

We must consolidate our voices against racism. We must unite all forms of racial discrimination. We must say no to racism. We must not ignore the realities of racism or try to hide behind fluffy words like “harmony” that really do not mean anything yet. A celebration of cultural diversity seems ironic if we are not having a conversation that needs to be had and if we are not actively all fighting racism together. If we do not fully acknowledge the real racial discrimination in Australia and recognise the extent of the work that still needs to be done, a day called Harmony Day will exist only as a fictional example of what could be, but never will be.