



End of a Magnificent Era

Emeritus Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya, passed away peacefully in the early hours of this morning. He is survived by his wife Rohini and sons Kanishka and Pradeep.

“Members of our Council and those involved in the multicultural, social work, academia and other sectors across Australia, are saddened by his passing. Known as Prof to some and Laki to many, Professor Jayasuriya’s contribution to multiculturalism especially from the perspectives of Citizenship, Substantive Equality and Anti-Racism is legendary. Not surprisingly many of us fondly referred to him as the Father of Multiculturalism,” said Council President, Ramdas Sankaran.

“Laki’s academic work and writing extended to a wide variety of topics including, Immigration, Multiculturalism, Buddhism, Engagement with Asia especially in reconciling Australia’s Geography with its History, Sociology of mental health, in particular cross cultural psychology and most importantly on Social policy on a range of issues in Australia as well as Sri Lanka”, he added.

“He was anything but the stereotypical academic as evidenced by how he fulfilled his role as the Commissioner of WA’s Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission in effectively applying the “theories” he advocated to achieve a socially just and harmonious society, one in which all Australians regardless of their backgrounds could achieve their full potential.”

“He has left Australia and not just the multicultural sector a very rich legacy for his writings have withstood the test of time and has influenced political leaders at the federal and state levels as well as captains of various industries. Laki also played an instrumental role in framing the state’s Multiculturalism Charter when Geoff Gallop was the Premier and on topics such as understanding and addressing racism (especially institutional racism), multiculturalism, engagement with Asia etc. He was certainly way ahead of his time,” said Mr. Sankaran.

“An avid lover of cricket and Aussie Rules, in true Jayasuriya fashion, he told his sons when he turned 86 that 87 was a going to be a tricky number! It also epitomises his view on the finality of life and his calm acceptance of it. In death as in life he knew no fear and one of the important legacies he left us, regardless of our professional and other backgrounds is the importance of social advocacy.”

Laki was a member of the Immigration Advisory Council, National Multicultural Advisory Council, and Chair, National Multicultural Advisory Committee on Education. He is a recipient of an Hon. DLitt from the University of Colombo, and from the University of Western Australia. He was one of 50 Australians honoured by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He received the Australian Government’s Centenary Medal in 2002. He was also made a Member of the Order of Australia, AM.

“The thoughtful and incisive advocacy of Prof Jayasuriya has left our state and nation a much better place for all of us. The best way we can remember and honour him is to ensure that we seek to emulate his example the best we can.”

“I held him in great awe for many reasons, one of them being my inability to get a job as a social worker in the 70s despite having recognition from the Australian Association of Social Workers and applying for more than a hundred jobs and he being at that time the Foundation Professor of Social work at UWA and continuing in that role for decades, without being a Social Worker i.e. he was a Social Psychologist. What’s more, he achieved this during the dark days of our White Australia policy. It is truly an end of an era the likes of which we have never known”, said Mr. Sankaran.

May his soul rest in peace.

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