Mayoral Speech
National Remembrance Service – Dunedin
Dunedin, Friday, 29 March 2019

Kia ora tatou

As-Salaam-Alaikum

Thank you for being here as we join hands with our our whānau in Christchurch and the rest of New Zealand to honour, together, the victims of this dreadful tragedy.

The events of March 15 were simply ghastly.

But the way Ōtepoti/Dunedin and indeed our nation has stepped forward with aroha, solidarity and care for our Muslim sisters and brothers is something we can be very proud of.

In the wake of the tragedy, I have been reflecting on the journey our city has been on – and is still on – towards greater inclusion and celebration of diversity.

People of different nationalities, cultures and religions have long chosen to make Dunedin home – many of them seeking security and a more peaceful way of life. Overwhelmingly, Dunedin has welcomed and supported them.

However, it would be misleading of anyone to claim that our city has always been a multicultural utopia.

Our city didn’t start out as very diverse. Scots and English is all. Some would say that is plenty of diversity!

Manawhenua were already long here of course, and included in city life, but not always on the fairest of terms.

The Chinese were invited to the goldfields and soon played a role in the mercantile life of the city, but they also faced considerable discrimination.

The Lebanese were active participants in Dunedin’s early business life but even into the late 20th century they suffered racial slurs. Other ethnicities did as well.

So, while our city has long been inclusive and diverse – in has sometimes been an inclusiveness that has tolerated difference rather than celebrated it. I suspect that is the case across our nation.

To be truly inclusive – to truly celebrate diversity, we need to tear down walls of ignorance. Some of us are scared of what we don’t know.

But if there’s anything that the events of the past fortnight have taught us, it is that Islam is a faith that teaches forgiveness, peace and love, just as other faiths do.
Indeed, it actually feels as if it is the local Muslim community supporting the rest of us through this terrible time, rather than the opposite - such is the courage, compassion and humility they’ve shown in the most horrific of circumstances.

They, along with many others, have made an extraordinary contribution to our city’s journey along the path to greater and more even-handed inclusion – to the manaakitanga we value and aspire to.

So while time may never truly heal the wounds of March 15, it is now up to all of us ensure that momentum continues, and that we spurn exclusion, genuinely celebrate diversity and embrace difference in Ōtepoti/Dunedin and across our nation.

Kia ora.

Dave Cull
Mayor of Dunedin