

# Ed Miliband's Integration Speech

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Can I start by saying I am delighted to be here with you in Tooting today. Tooting is a fantastic part of London. And it is great to be here with my friend, the Member of Parliament, Sadiq Khan. It is somewhere where people of all different backgrounds, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and those of no faith, live and work together. A place where people don't just tolerate each other, but build friendships, families and businesses across communities. That's the kind of country we want to build. And that's why I have come to Tooting today.

This year, 2012, will always be remembered as the year of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Memories of those Games are going to last a very long time. Everyone will talk about the medals, the crowds, the volunteers, a nation sharing in the excitement. But there is a lesson that stands out. And we cannot leave this year without pausing to think about it. It is about our unity as a country and our diversity. The Games came to Britain because of the vibrant, generous-spirited, multi-ethnic, diverse city we presented in the London bid. And when the medals came in, the world saw the same of our nation. I will never forget the privilege of being in the Olympic Park. Dancing to the Spice Girls with David Cameron and Boris Johnson at the Closing Ceremony is definitely etched on my memory.

But it was an even bigger privilege to see Mo Farah win the first of his gold medals. If anything was a defining moment of the Olympics, amidst so many defining moments, it was Mo Farah's victories. And wasn't that an amazing interview when he was asked: "Wouldn't you rather be running for Somalia?" And he replied "This is my country mate". That's why I will be voting for him for Sports Personality of the Year on Sunday. And we all took equal pride in the achievements of all our athletes, from Mo Farah to Jessica Ennis, to Zara Philips, the granddaughter of the Queen. And we know: one third of Team GB medal winners had parents or grandparents born outside this country. And their diversity was reflected in the crowds that cheered them on. In fact, the whole Olympic experience reflected the diversity of modern Britain. So it was an immense achievement for our country and it reflects a crucial reality about our nation today.

Social, cultural and ethnic diversity has made us stronger. And it's not just the Olympics and Paralympics that make me think that. For generations, new people have arrived in Britain, often seeking sanctuary from oppression, and have worked hard to build a new life.

And they have contributed enormously to the country.  
I say this as the child of immigrants.  
I wouldn't be standing here if it hadn't been for the generosity of Britain.  
My parents came here as refugees from the terrors of the Nazis.  
And they made a life for themselves.  
And therefore I owe my life to this country.

I went to a comprehensive school where today there are young people whose families come from over 60 countries, with 50 different languages spoken.  
It is part of the success story of London: a truly global city.  
I love the diversity of London.  
A city to which people from all over the world have come for thousands of years.  
And it's true of our country as a whole.  
A quarter of Britain's Nobel Prize winners were born overseas.  
Our NHS is staffed by nurses from all over the world.

So we are a multi-ethnic, diverse Britain. Increasingly so.  
As this week's census, published on Tuesday, showed.  
And let's recognise the way the British people have embraced this diversity.  
Because frankly we've had our fair share of doomsayers in Britain over the years.  
From Oswald Moseley in the 1930s, Enoch Powell in the 1960s to Nick Griffin today.  
Those who said it wasn't possible for us to get along.  
But what's actually happened since the Second World War?  
Despite our national troubles -- from the riots in the 1980s to the horrific murder of Stephen Lawrence -- we have worked together to create a more open-minded society.  
Where there are strong connections between people of different backgrounds.  
The census actually showed that people marry across racial, ethnic and cultural divides.  
They bring up kids, and make a future for themselves more frequently and more successfully than in many other countries.  
Indeed, this week's census showed that people of mixed race are one of the fastest-growing groups in Britain.  
A development people are entirely comfortable with.  
That is a big change.

Division, racism and prejudice were features of everyday life for far too long in the Twentieth Century.  
Many people here are too young to remember but it is only a few decades ago, signs said "no blacks and no Irish" in pubs and landlords' windows.  
Think about how people would see that today.  
Today that is unthinkable and unacceptable.  
That is a sign of how far Britain has come.  
So I believe we have a positive story to tell.  
But at the same time, as celebrating what is good, those of us who believe in this vision must face up to the challenges not shy away from them.

We must not fall into the trap of believing that to talk about people's anxieties is to fuel them.  
And there is profound anxiety about immigration.  
Some of this is economic.  
I've talked about why we need to be tougher on unscrupulous employers, who exploit those coming here and undercut those already here.

Some of this anxiety is about where money is spent within communities, including benefits. There is also anxiety about the pace of change.

Over the last fifteen years, migration to Britain has been faster and more extensive than it has ever been in our history.

With many people coming here, especially from those countries new to the European Union. The last Labour government made mistakes.

As I have said before, the capacity of our economy to absorb new migrants was greater than the capacity of some of our communities to adapt.

We have said we will learn lessons from Eastern European migration and ensure maximum transitional controls in future.

And, as I explained earlier this year, we will look at the whole system of control for non-EU migration, including the Government's cap, to ensure a system that works.

Britain must always control its borders.

It is clearly in the national interest that we do so.

But people also have important anxieties not just about people coming here but about how we live together when they do.

Our cultural and social interaction.

These are anxieties that are felt across the world, as globalisation makes it easier for people to move around.

Of course immigration has always been unsettling.

With new ways of life, new religions, new people in neighbourhoods.

It takes time for people to get to know each other.

The extent of change can intensify the anxiety.

To give a sense of the scale of Britain's change: almost one million children in Britain now don't speak English as their first language at home, double what it was in 1997.

And the impact of change is often felt differently in different places.

As new arrivals often settle in particular neighbourhoods.

Some towns and cities have already coped better with the changes that have occurred than others.

But I believe all areas can cope with the pressures if we recognise them and understand how to respond.

So what should we do next to deal with people's anxieties about the way our country is changing?

Some people say that what we should aim for is what they call assimilation.

They say that people can come here and be part of our culture but only on the condition that they just abandon theirs.

Why is this vision so wrong for our country?

Because it ignores fundamental truths about the British people and who we are.

I think of the family I met on the train station in Leicester last week.

A young woman of twenty asked what I was doing there.

I said I had a long day at Labour Party events.

I asked what she was doing there?

She said she had had a long day at a family party in Leicester.

"Typical African family party" she said with a shrug.

And then she told me her story.

Her parents had come from Sierra Leone as refugees and she had been born here.

She had never actually visited Sierra Leone but she was so proud of her family's culture and roots.

And she was proud to be British.

And that is the real story of Britain today.

The reality of our multiple identities.

One Nation doesn't mean one identity.

People can be proudly, patriotically British without abandoning their cultural roots.

I know that because it is my own story too.

I am Jewish.

The son of immigrants.

I was born a Londoner.

I represent Doncaster North in Parliament.

I support Leeds United football club.

That can be tougher even than being Leader of the Labour Party.

And I am proud to be British.

And, I want my two sons to understand this complicated heritage and to be as proud of Britain as I am.

So when people say that we need assimilation.

Only one identity. The same for all of us.

I don't agree.

Others say people can simply live side by side in their own communities, tolerating each other's backgrounds but living separate lives.

Protected from hatreds but never building a common bond.

Now, I don't believe we can be comfortable with that sort of separation.

Separation means isolation.

And you can't succeed in Britain if you're isolated.

Isolation also breeds ignorance.

And ignorance breeds suspicion and prejudice.

And it sometimes even leads to community to turn on community.

We saw that a decade ago in the disturbances in Oldham and Bradford.

That is not how we build One Nation either.

I think the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks put it very well.

He said assimilation was like going to stay in some fancy old country house and being told you are a guest in my house and must dress for dinner as I do.

On the other hand, people living separately is like a country just being a hotel: you are simply a paying guest who can put the 'do not disturb' sign outside the door.

My vision of Britain for the 21st century is not like an old country house or a hotel.

We must think of the home we build together - in all its richness, variety, diversity.

We must live together across communities.

Overcoming division, without asking people to lose their sense of themselves.

A Britain where people of all backgrounds, all races, all ethnicities, all cultures, can practise their own religion, continue their own customs, but also come together to forge a new and better identity.

But here is the challenge: to make this work, we've all got to work at it.

We are one of the few countries in Europe without a comprehensive strategy for integration.

We must put that right.

And politicians must be able and willing to talk about these issues.  
Now integration is a process.  
Because of my family's history, I think of the Jewish story in Britain.  
For example, those who came to the East End of London in the early 20th century.  
They often came without a penny, became shopkeepers and congregated in particular areas.  
A century on, the descendants of those penniless shopkeepers are doing well: throughout our civic, business and cultural life.  
I think of my own father who came here in 1940 and only achieved what he did because he was able to learn English at Acton Technical College.  
He went on to be a University Professor.  
What this teaches me is that the process of integration will happen over time, but as in my father's case, we must take steps to enable it to happen.

And my Party has got lessons to learn here.  
When we were in government, we took some steps to help people from different backgrounds interact.  
Introducing a citizenship test for those seeking to come here.  
And citizenship ceremonies to celebrate their achievement.  
These were good things.  
But too often we were a bit optimistic.  
Thinking people's connections with each other would just take care of themselves.  
That as long as the economy was doing well, that services were well-run, people would learn to get on together, and our common life would flourish automatically.  
And while the problems were real.  
Our solutions seemed too abstract.  
We talked about "shared citizenship".  
But we did too little to tackle the realities of segregation in communities that were struggling to cope.

So Labour has to change as well.  
What does a strategy for integration look like?  
It needs to be rooted in real life including language, housing and the workplace.  
First, we should start with language.  
We all know that the beginning of any real connection with a neighbour or colleague, work-mate or friend is a conversation.  
But we can only converse if we can speak the same language.  
So if we are going to build One Nation, our goal should be that everyone in Britain should know how to speak English.  
We should expect that of people that come here.  
The last Labour government raised the language requirements for people seeking to enter Britain on work and family visas.  
That was the right approach.  
But of course there is a minority who have come here without being able to speak English.  
This makes life harder for them.  
Those who don't speak English are less able to get a good job, less able to make the most of being in this country.  
And it is also bad for Britain as a whole.  
Stopping us building the bond we need between newcomers and those who have been here for generations.

This Government has dramatically scaled back the chances for English language learning. In order to protect English language teaching, some local authorities have looked to reduce the cost of translation services.

Of course essential translation services, including interpreters in our courts and hospitals, must have their role.

But English language must be the priority.

In a world where there is less money around, more of a priority than many written translation materials.

And English language is particularly important for the next generation.

In schools, teaching of English as an additional language is essential.

And the earlier that support is given the better for all the children in a school.

Where there are Home School Agreements, English language learning should be included.

Which too often doesn't happen at the moment.

That would ensure that both schools and parents share the responsibility for helping foreign-born children learn how to speak English.

And communities themselves should help too.

As many do.

I know there are excellent social enterprises across the country, like the Goodwin Development Trust in Hull, where one generation of immigrants take it upon themselves to teach English to the next.

And I know there are similar projects here in Tooting.

But language is only the start.

In housing, we should act too.

At the moment, it is far too easy for unscrupulous landlords to prey on newcomers to our country.

In Newham, the borough that hosted the Olympic Games, an advert for a diverse Britain, we see how new migrants can be exploited and communities undermined.

The Mayor of Newham, Robin Wales, says that the record is of one house with 38 people of whom 16 were children.

This is terrible for people in the neighbourhood and terrible for people living in the house.

We can't expect people to embrace their neighbours, to build a community, if 38 people have been crammed into the house next door.

And governments of both parties have done too little to tackle this.

We should crack down on criminal landlords so they cannot exploit people in over-crowded, sub-standard slum housing.

And we should end the practice of using tied-in housing to pay people less than the minimum wage and lock workers into shocking housing conditions, isolated from mainstream society.

Mixed communities are the key to making integration work.

And mixed income housing is the key to creating mixed communities.

That won't happen if developers are given a blank cheque to build housing only for the better off.

So local government must be able to take action to ensure affordable housing is part of new developments.

And then take the workplace.

Far too often we have people not meeting and mixing in the workplace as they should.

There are recruitment agencies that close their books to local workers and hire only from overseas, often advertising only in foreign languages.

In some industries, there are some shifts and tasks that are still segregated by national origin. And there are jobs which still recruit far more easily from within one community than from other.

A Labour government would work with business to build a more integrated economy.

We should eliminate the shocking practices of shift patterns that leave people working alongside others only from the same national or ethnic background.

It's illegal. And it's wrong.

And we must ensure that people using public services don't feel excluded either.

The more diverse the public sector workforce, including from Eastern Europe, the greater the importance of English.

That's in the interests of everyone who uses our public services, wherever they are from.

So we should extend the requirements in many professions for English proficiency to all publicly-funded, public-facing jobs.

Many people being paid the lowest wages do a fantastic job working as care workers.

But older people of different backgrounds often say that the limited English skills of some care workers present them with difficulties.

So, for example, we've said there should be new ways of improving quality across social care.

And English language should be part of the training requirements for new workers.

We will work together as a nation far more effectively when we can always talk together at work and in our public services.

So in language, in housing and in the workplace, we need a new strategy for integration.

And because it is a One Nation strategy everybody should play their part:

- Local authorities.

- Communities.

- Charities.

Charities and community organisations have played an invaluable role in bringing Britain together over the last few years.

Here in Tooting, the Balham and Tooting Community Association brings people of all backgrounds into contact.

It is a fantastic example of what needs to be done in communities across the country.

And many churches, temples, mosques, synagogues reach out to all parts of the community, and that is to be applauded too.

So I am the son of immigrants.

I love Britain.

I love its diversity.

But I am not going to shy away from the difficult issues.

And I know we have to work better together to build a common way of life.

The lesson I take from my parents' generation -- the generation that rebuilt the country after the war -- is a simple one:

Britain is at its best when it comes together as a nation.

Not when it stands divided.

That's what One Nation is all about.

We saw that strength this year in the Olympics and Paralympics.

But at the same time we know there is anxiety about immigration.

And what it means for our culture.  
The answer is not to sweep it under the carpet.  
Or fail to talk about it.  
Or say that people are prejudiced.  
Nor is it to make promises that can't be kept.  
It is to deal with all of the issues that concern people.  
If we work hard, and we work together, we can build One Nation.  
A proper strategy for integration.  
So that we have a fair nation not an unjust one  
A nation with common bonds, a common life, where everyone has a stake, not a segregated society.  
A confident nation not an anxious one.  
And if we do that, we will all be stronger as a result