

## House of Commons Debates

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### OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

*Thursday, May 15, 2008*

#### **Komagata Maru**

(Motion)

**Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Indo-Canadian community, on behalf of immigrants and so many Canadians, who are seeking justice for a dark chapter in our nation's history.

Our great nation, Canada, is a symbol of hope for so many nations throughout the world. We are a nation which champions equality, opportunity, acceptance and respect. These are our hallmarks.

However, the journey for this success has not been easy. It is for this reason that I stand before the House today to once again ask for the government to apologize to the Indo-Canadian community and others impacted by the 1914 *Komagata Maru* injustice.

The *Komagata Maru* tragedy occurred at a time when our nation had immigration policies that were exclusionary, discriminatory and racist, policies that served to divide our nation and played on our nation's fears.

It is these policies that resulted in the Chinese having a head tax imposed, 900 Jewish people being denied entry into Canada and the internment of over 700 men from the Italian community in the second world war. It is these injustices that will forever serve as a reminder of the struggle and the challenges that so many immigrants have encountered in their hope for a better future in Canada.

We fast forward to 2008 and realize that it is many of these Canadians from immigrant communities who have succeeded, who have achieved and who have prospered and contributed to building a better Canada.

Some people, including many MPs in the Conservative government, have actually questioned the need for an apology, 94 years after the *Komagata Maru* injustice. For them I say, an apology will never erase the mistakes of the past, neither will it remove the memories, the

scars and the pain of those who have suffered. However, it is an opportunity for us as a nation, for Canadians to correct a wrong, to reflect and to learn from our mistakes.

An apology is not about scoring political points. It is about closing a dark chapter in our nation's history and marking a new era for our nation.

An apology will be an opportunity to educate the young children of our nation of the sacrifices, the struggles and the challenges in our journey to being a symbol of hope for so many others.

An apology will send a message to every child, to every man, to every woman and to every senior in our country that it does not matter if they are rich or if they are poor, if they are black or white, Italian, Indian or Chinese, but if they have a dream in our nation and they work hard, they too can make it a reality.

This is one of those issues that is above partisanship. Six weeks ago when I brought forward the motion, the government was opposed to the motion. Today, I hope, regardless of our political stripe, that as parliamentarians we will do the right thing when the motion comes to a vote, that we will unite and we will do the right thing for the children and for Canadians, that we will ensure that the government actually apologizes.

It is an issues of justice, of fairness, of equality, of compassion and of understanding. We, as a nation, have been built on the hard work, the vision and the passion of immigrants. Giving an apology takes reflection, it takes courage and it takes strength. We as a nation have that in us to do the right thing.

An apology will send a very strong message that we will never go back to the politics of discrimination, of racism and of exclusion, but that we will work together as all Canadians to have the faith, to have the belief and the confidence that we will continue to build a country which is a symbol of hope.

It is time to put closure for this dark chapter. It is time to begin the process of healing with three simple words: We are sorry.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):**

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)