

Inaugural John Menadue Oration

Opening remarks by
Travers McLeod

Melbourne, 2 November 2017

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It's my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to our inaugural John Menadue Oration.

Can I start by acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, the traditional owners of the land on which we're gathered, and pay my respects to the elders of the past, the present, and especially the elders to come.

Future generations of the first Australians and those of us who have since joined them are at the heart of tonight's discussion about democracy.

When he eulogised Gough Whitlam three years ago, almost to the day, Noel Pearson praised Whitlam's belief in "the vitality of our democracy [as] a proper mission of government", to be "renewed and invigorated". That renewal includes of course genuine Constitutional recognition of indigenous Australians.

Can I also acknowledge our guest of honour, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Dr Marty Natalegawa KCMG, along with his wife, Ibu Sranya, the Indonesian Consul-General, Ibu Dewi Wahab and her husband, Pak Syahrir.

In a moment, Pak Marty will be introduced by his good friend, Professor the Hon. Gareth Evans AC QC, former Australian Foreign Minister, now Chancellor of the Australian National University, and a self-declared *incorrigible optimist*.

You're all distinguished guests tonight. Many of CPD's current and former staff, fellows and Board members are here. I want to pay tribute to each of them, led now by our Chair, Terry Moran AC, and Deputy Chair, Dr Jeni Whalan.

I've left two acknowledgments till last but in many respects, they are the most important. They are the reason we're here.

Ten years ago, I was drinking warm beer on a cold day in pre-Brexit Britain.

Around the same time, John Menadue AO and Miriam Lyons became founding Chair and Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Development.

John and Miriam were pioneers. They created this organisation because they wanted better ideas for Australia, and for evidence to matter.

As another famous Australian might say, we should be so lucky.

But in a fractious political and policy environment, I'm proud to say that CPD has built a team and the credibility to cut through and get stuff done. To create, to connect, and to convince on issues that matter for Australia over the long run.

Our Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration now involves 8 countries, the UNHCR and IOM. It's helping to change responses to people fleeing persecution, including for the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the region, with over 600,000 people having fled Myanmar for Bangladesh since late August.

Our research on climate change has convinced boards, regulators like APRA and senior military officers to change the conversation about climate risk.

We have exposed huge governance and performance gaps in Australia's big service delivery systems, like jobs and settlement services.

And we've uncovered inequity in Australia's schools, pushing persuasively – and somewhat successfully – to level the playing field.

I want to pay tribute to one of our fellows, the late Bernie Shepherd, who worked so tirelessly on this right up until he passed away earlier this year.

We're proud of this work, not just because it's made a difference but also because it's been produced on a fairly lean budget.

Organisations like CPD don't last for a decade without some brilliant supporters – whether they be organisations or individuals – who believe in independent policy research in the public interest.

I won't do justice to our supporters by reading out their names. But let me say this. Their personal and organisational support, and the generosity of several people in this room each year for ten years, has made our work possible. Thank you.

As you know, we've named this annual lecture the "Menadue Oration" to recognise John's long-standing contribution to public policy in Australia and to CPD.

The question Pak Marty will address – Can democracy deliver? – is perfect given how fearless John has been to building a better democracy throughout his life, as a former Ambassador, Secretary of Immigration, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet under Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam, in business, and now as CPD fellow and blogger extraordinaire.

Those of us lucky enough to live in Australia don't need to be briefed on the Brexit negotiations or the histrionics of the Trump administration to realise that democracy and the international rules-based order face profound pressure across the globe. Australia isn't immune to this pressure. Quite the opposite.

We've framed our 10th Anniversary series around democratic renewal because we believe successful democracies are stable but not static. We believe debates about democracy can't be resolved by focussing simply on "trust" and "leadership". They require a deeper discussion about Australian attitudes to democracy and to government, the connection of those ideas and preferences with more effective government, and a clearer shared purpose of what our democracy should pursue.

Speaking in October 1942, Robert Menzies said Australians "disagree among ourselves on almost every conceivable subject, but we are all democrats.

For Menzies, democracy was like a piano that had to be played: he said that "we must understand and experience democracy if democracy is to be a living faith and is to survive".

You're probably wondering, why has CPD asked an outsider to lecture us about democracy?

Well, for one thing, sometimes Australia should do less lecturing and more listening.

Second, often the best way to start a conversation with yourself is with a viewpoint of someone from outside.

1 in 30 people in the world are Indonesian. It's the third largest democracy in the world, with over 13,000 islands covering a distance equivalent to the gap between London and Tel Aviv. That's about 1/8th of the Earth's circumference. It's our closest neighbour. More people tweet from Jakarta each day than any other city in the world.

Personally, I'm fascinated by the opportunity to hear what Pak Marty as an Indonesian, thinks about Australia's democracy. Do we 'forget' things about democracy because we take it for granted. And what we can learn from Indonesia, as one of the world's most vibrant and newest democracies.

After we've heard from Marty, he'll be joined on stage by Laura Tingle from the *Australian Financial Review*. Laura was on Q&A herself this week, but tonight will be asking Pak Marty the questions, and seek some questions from you.

So, let's get started. Would you please welcome the Hon. Gareth Evans AC QC, to introduce our guest of honour.
