

Subject: PRIME MINISTER - TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH AT APOLOGY CALLIGRAPHY UNVEILLING - PARLIAMENT HOUSE - CANBERRA - 26 MAY 2008 [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED:NO CAVEATS]

PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Apology Calligraphy unveiling

Parliament House

26 May, 2008

Introduction

Thank you Jenny and thank you Tony for being here as well. Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner; National Sorry Day Committee Chairs, Helen Moran and Sally Fitzpatrick; Stolen Generation Alliance Chairs, Christine King and Phil Elsegood; Gemma Black; Barbara Livesey and ladies and gentlemen. And I join Jenny in honoring the Ngunnawal people on whose land we meet.

Firstly this is an important day, because it goes back to where our process of reconciliation in many respects began. And that's the Bringing them Home report. It's very difficult to read that report and not be moved by it. The stories contained within it are terrible stories, just terrible stories. The good part of the bringing them home report was, it would enable us as a nation to begin to reflect on what had happened, to begin to reflect on how we as a nation could make amends for past wrongs. And how we as a nation then could move forward to deal with the challenges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia for the future.

The national apology delivered here in February was one part of what I'd see as a continuing process. It's important, it's important for the nation, the Parliament, the Government and supported by the Opposition to have advanced that motion of Apology. It is important because of the recognition, what had transpired in the past and important in terms of a simple statement of Sorry on the part of the Parliament. But important on top of that because it began our process of closing the gap between Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal Australia. And that's where the hard part begins, that's where the really hard part begins.

Some people say that the problem with the National apology is that it's all about symbols. You know something, there is something very potent about an apology if through the process of giving it we then clear a path of action ahead of us. Someone explained it to me once that it's very difficult to establish a normal relationship with somebody where there have been past wrongs. We simply don't go up and acknowledge that those wrongs have been committed. And it's only once that occurs that you can truly and effectively move forward.

So for us that was very much the first step. Of course the steps which come after that are absolutely critical, are absolutely critical. Since that time Jenny in particular has been very busy. \$100 million for Indigenous maternal and child health services; \$56 million over four years to improve literacy and numeracy for every Indigenous child; \$100 million to employ 200 new teachers in the Northern Territory; \$90 million to create 300 jobs for indigenous rangers. And we recently announced \$647 million in Housing funding in partnership with the Northern Territory Government, which will deliver around 750 new houses and over 2500 upgrades over the next 5 years and beyond. All part of a \$1.6 billion Indigenous housing program.

So symbols without substance, are as I said on the apology day itself, nothing more than a clanging gong. Symbols when added with substance begin to

add up to something and that's the course of action upon which this Government is now embarked.

As a reminder of the Apology, we have before us of course this magnificent calligraphic manuscript on velum or calfskin. The calligraphy has been done by Gemma Black, a local Canberra woman, whose work adorns other parts of Parliament House - in particular she regularly works on the Presiding Officer and the Speaker of the House Visitor Books. While she has more than twenty years experience with commissions from both public and private sectors throughout the country, working on this project, she's described as an honour for her both personally and professionally.

This artwork has been donated to the Parliament and therefore on permanent display as part of the Parliament House collection, I thank her for that. It will reside beside the Coolamon, presented to the Government by the Stolen Generations in thanks for the apology, in a place that reflects its importance to our country. The artwork will stand as a constant reminder of where we have just come from and of the journey of healing among us all and where we intend to go to in bringing that journey towards a proper conclusion - which is closing the gap between indigenous and non indigenous Australians.

Prior to the apology the Government engaged with representatives of the two national Stolen Generations organisations to ensure that the apology reflected their aspirations. The Government has continued this engagement. I would like to applaud the growing partnership between the National Sorry Day Committee and the Stolen Generations Alliance.

The practical measures highlighted in the Bringing Them Home Report, included:

- commemoration activities,
- training for health professionals,

- family reunion services,
- language, culture and history projects,
- parenting services,
- prisoner and juvenile justice services,
- ensuring national standards for care and protection of Indigenous children and
- minimum access to family records.

A number of these measures merge with our national priorities for a modern Australia, including the national child protection framework, and giving children the best start in life through early childhood and parenting programs. The Government is committed to working with Stolen Generations to make sure their voices are heard in the design of these policies and programs, and to bring forward some concrete outcomes by this time next year.

Today the Australian Government continues its commitment to the ongoing healing of our Stolen Generations. It is so important that we build on the goodwill and opportunities that were opened up by the apology. One of the main concerns that has arisen through our engagement with the stolen generations has been the critical need for healing services to help individuals and families with their own healing.

This is important work. At the end of June, Stolen Generations members, professionals in men's health, trauma, child safety, mental health, suicide prevention, family reunion services and Government departments will come together to meet to map out the way forward, together. They will consider the evidence. This might include information about experience in other jurisdictions and other parts of Australia. And research led most recently by Doctor Fiona Stanley, the head of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and some of the ideas presented at the 2020 summit.

As a first step, the Department of Health and Ageing, with advice from the Stolen Generations working group, will develop a training program for mainstream health services to improve their ability to care for the Stolen Generations, their families and others who were affected. As part of improving access to services, we will develop information materials to promote options for care available to members of the Stolen Generation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Australians, this is a good day.

And it is the beginning of what I hope will be many good days into the future. Many of us have felt almost a sense of learned helplessness, about how to deal with the challenges of indigenous Australia in the past. It is as if so many things have been trialled and that so many things have not worked. I think it is equally important to look forward with optimism about the things that do work and the things that are going well.

We must be realistic about where we need to improve and lift our game. And we intend to be realistic. I said at the time of the national apology statement that we wish to embark upon a new compact with indigenous Australia which is anchored in the principle of mutual responsibility and mutual respect. And that will be very much our governing principle for the future. The challenges are huge. We need to honour the successes where they appear. And treasure them, and be positive about them. We need to be blunt and realistic about where the problems exist and work our way through them.

Always, always, measuring how we go along the way. Always, always seeking to ensure that where we end up is better, better than the place that we left from.

So I thank you one and all for being long term partners with Government's of all political persuasions in this very long journey towards reconciliation in Australia.

The National Apology is one step in that process. National Sorry Day is another part of that process. Closing the gap is the framework within which we need to work for the future.

Today on this 10th Anniversary of the first Sorry Day, it is therefore with great pleasure that I present this work to the Parliament of Australia to commemorate and celebrate this continuing journey of healing for us all.