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# FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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## APOLOGY

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*PM Kevin Rudd  
Parliament House, Canberra  
13 February 2008*

At 9am, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made this Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples:

I move:

*That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.*

*We reflect on their past mistreatment.*

*We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations – this blemished chapter in our nation's history.*

*The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.*

*We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.*

*We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.*

*For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.*

*To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.*

*And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.*

*We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.*

*For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.*

*We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.*

*A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.*

*A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.*

*A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.*

*A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.*

*A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.*

‘There are thousands, tens of thousands of ... stories of forced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their mums and dads over the better part of a century. Some of these stories are graphically told in *Bringing them home*, the report commissioned in 1995 by Prime Minister Keating and received in 1997 by Prime Minister Howard. There is something terribly primal about these firsthand accounts. The pain is searing; it screams from the pages. The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity.

These stories cry out to be heard; they cry out for an apology. Instead, from the nation's parliament there has been a stony, stubborn and deafening silence for more than a decade; a view that somehow we, the parliament, should suspend our most basic instincts of what is right and what is wrong; a view

that, instead, we should look for any pretext to push this great wrong to one side, to leave it languishing with the historians, the academics and the cultural warriors, as if the stolen generations are little more than an interesting sociological phenomenon. But the stolen generations are not intellectual curiosities. They are human beings, human beings who have been damaged deeply by the decisions of parliaments and governments. But, as of today, the time for denial, the time for delay, has at last come to an end. The nation is demanding of its political leadership to take us forward. Decency, human decency, universal human decency, demands that the nation now step forward to right an historical wrong. That is what we are doing in this place today. But should there still be doubts as to why we must now act, let the parliament reflect for a moment on the following facts: that, between 1910 and 1970, between 10 and 30 per cent of Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their mothers and fathers; that, as a result, up to 50,000 children were forcibly taken from their families; that this was the product of the deliberate, calculated policies of the state as reflected in the explicit powers given to them under statute; that this policy was taken to such extremes by some in administrative authority that the forced extractions of children of so-called 'mixed lineage' were seen as part of a broader policy of dealing with 'the problem of the Aboriginal population'.

...

Then we come to the argument of intergenerational responsibility, also used by some to argue against giving an apology today. But let us remember the fact that the forced removal of Aboriginal children was happening as late as the early 1970s. The 1970s is not exactly a point in remote antiquity. There are still serving members of this parliament who were first elected to this place in the early 1970s. It is well within the adult memory span of many of us. The uncomfortable truth for us all is that the parliaments of the nation, individually and collectively, enacted statutes and delegated authority under those statutes that made the forced removal of children on racial grounds fully lawful.

...

[F]or our nation, the course of action is clear: that is, to deal now with what has become one of the darkest chapters in Australia's history. In doing so, we are doing more than contending with the facts, the evidence and the often rancorous public debate. In doing so, we are also wrestling with our own soul. This is not, as some would argue, a black-arch view of history; it is just the truth: the cold, confronting, uncomfortable truth—facing it, dealing with it, moving on from it. Until we fully confront that truth, there will always be a shadow hanging over us and our future as a fully united and fully reconciled people. It is time to reconcile. It is time to recognise the injustices of the past. It is time to say sorry. It is time to move forward together.'

**Larapinta Drive West MacDonnell Ranges**

Teena McCarthy

*Oil on wood*

290mm x 150mm

