

**Launch of “Us Taken Away Kids”  
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission,  
Sydney**

**The Hon Jenny Macklin, MP  
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services  
and Indigenous Affairs  
11 December 2007**

**(Check against delivery)**

- I would like to begin by paying my respects to the Gadigal peoples of the Eora Nation. Thank you also, Alan Madden, for your warm welcome.
- I'd like to recognise the Stolen Generation survivors here with us today, especially those who have contributed to the *Us Taken Away Kids* magazine.
- I'd also like to recognise Mark Bin-Barkar and Alec Kruger – two men who were honoured at the Human Rights Awards yesterday.
- And to Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Commissioner. Thank you for the invitation to join you all today.
- Our new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has indicated that he intends to apologise to the Stolen Generations, to acknowledge our past. Very importantly, he has committed to framing this apology, both the language and the nature of the apology, in a consultative and respectful way.

- Today I am formally beginning that process by meeting with representatives from the National Sorry Day Committee and the Stolen Generations Alliance. Also with Professor Mick Dodson and Tom Calma.
- We want to stand together and pledge a new relationship that is steady and grounded in respect.
- There are many sources of strength and commonality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians – our shared love of this land and our shared desire to live happily and fulfilled family lives.
- We need to draw on those shared strengths to address the wrongs of the past – to acknowledge the devastating impact of the forcible removal of Indigenous children on the basis of race, on the lives of so many Indigenous families.
- We have to try and understand the heartache and listen, to hear what needs to be done to build for the future.
- We are at a juncture where healing is possible, where I hope we can build a consensus about the way forward.
- So many Australians want to be part of this path to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – young and old, leaders in business and the community, in the cities and in our country towns.
- We see the purpose of saying “sorry” as building a bridge and establishing respect so that together we can move forward.

- Fundamentally I think this is the right thing to do.
- To give force to the Apology, the new Australian Government intends to implement a national plan to “close the life expectancy gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians over the next generation. Like those of you who have been pressing for this commitment, we know this will need concerted action.
- We intend to begin with the Indigenous children being born today. To say to them they should have the same life chances as other Australian children. Our focus is on early childhood health and education. We will start with delivering comprehensive child and maternal health services, parenting support and universal pre-school education for all four year olds.
- To this we will add intensive literacy and numeracy education in the early years and individual learning plans for Indigenous children for each year they are at school to make sure of their progress.
- We have committed to “closing the life expectancy gap” within a generation but have also set interim targets – to halve infant mortality and literacy and numeracy gaps within a decade.
- For children to benefit from these improved health and education services they have to be safe.
- There is yet more horrific evidence today that too many Indigenous children are not safe, that they are being abused.

- As you know there is a very clear difference between children being removed on the basis of their race, and children being removed for their own safety and protection.
- The revelations from Queensland in recent days are yet another shocking reminder of the child abuse taking place.
- Like the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh and the Indigenous women of Queensland who have spoken out today including Boni Robertson, I believe that child safety is paramount, and child victims of violence deserve the full protection of the law.
- In this case the child protection system and the courts failed the little girl in question.
- We are committed to working with State and Territory Governments and communities to do more to protect children from abuse and neglect, and build a safe culture within communities.
- Strong action to protect children is paramount.
- We are also here today to recognise the extraordinary resilience of those who were removed, as part of the Stolen Generations.

- I am delighted to launch the magazine, “Us Taken Away Kids” which commemorates the 10th anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* Report.
- I congratulate Tom and his team at HREOC and all the contributors on the publication and I look forward to a close working relationship over the exciting and challenging times ahead.