

Sorry Day, 26th May 2006

Kimberley Stolen Generation Aboriginal Corporation Chairperson's Speech

Welcome to members, guests and friends to our humble Sorry Day ceremony. I have great pleasure in welcoming you all on behalf of the members of the Kimberley Stolen Generation Community and the Kimberley Stolen Generation Committee. I call upon everyone to give 1 minute's silence for the many children who were taken from family, those that have deceased and those still alive today.

In particular let's also respect the loss recently of Uncle Jack Sahanna and Auntie Margie Birch who passed away recently. (1 Minute silence).

Welcome to this special place, the grounds of the Holy Child Orphanage here in Yawuru peoples' country; a place that played an intricate role in the lives and development of young women from Stolen Generations to girls who were placed here for various reasons. It is probably fair to say that this place is also like a special sacred site for the change of course in life for many young children.

Today, nationally through out our country, Sorry Day events/ceremonies are taking place, in recognition of the sad dark part of Australia's history that Australia still denies. The ignorance is still prevalent throughout our country that the kids were taken for their own good etc. The media that pumps up the issues in the various media outlets today support the principles of removing children.

Friends, the truth is we live in a different era. We as a country should be miles down the track in understanding about the social disadvantages that our people face in their journey in life, but today our people, and I mean that in the context of Australia as a whole, the Original inhabitants of this country, are treated as third class citizens. As a minority we collectively tend to believe this and bury ourselves in our own misfortune. But I call on all honest, human spirited Australians who are not Indigenous to stand up and support the minority, the original Australians. Support our people to overcome the social genocide that condemns our people into a "bird in a cage" principle by being kept controlled and governed by Government policy and ignorance and fed programs, ideas and concepts that are engineered by people who do not understand the plight of our Indigenous people and their obligations to each other through many facets and factors that distinguishes Indigenous from Non Indigenous.

I am moved to the depth of my heart for the voice from the wilderness his holiness Pope Benedict II calling for the Australian Government to apologise to the Aboriginal people. His voice and call is like the many voices of angels bringing the good news of salvation and spiritual inspiration. It assists the aching in many peoples hearts to hear the voice of truth, justice and holy intervention. The new Catholic Pope was welcoming the new Australian ambassador to the Holy See, Anne Maree Plunkett, late last week, when he said: "In regard to the Aboriginal people of your land, there is still much to be achieved. Their social situation is cause for much pain. I encourage you and the Government to continue to address with compassion and determination the deep underlying causes of their plight." And he went on: "Commitment to truth opens the way to lasting reconciliation through the healing process of asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness - two indispensable elements for peace."

The actual statement itself I think is clear, it's direct, and it's very challenging. Twenty years ago, during a visit to Alice Springs, Pope John Paul II was equally challenging, arguing an apology from government was important to reconciliation.

KSGAC is playing its small but I believe big role through the creation of the flower the native cotton, which is a symbol of sorrow, hurt and reconciliation. Our agenda here is to continue the awareness of the plight of the Stolen Generation peoples journey, it seeks recognition for their painful journey: the fragmentation between Mother and child.

The native cotton speaks out aloud in volumes as the wide spread flower itself grows throughout the country scattered like the children were. We endeavour through this flower to revive the reconciliation process and seek the true apology and recognition of the atrocities carried out against our people in the name of colonisation, progress and development of this country. We must have true recognition of this so we can move forward as a country.

KSGAC will also be bold in saying that we want 26th May, "Sorry Day" to be a day recognised constitutionally as a public holiday, recognising the Indigenous people of Australia past, present and future. Then we can move on and work at the social and economic stability of our Indigenous people. We must make people feel good inside their soul, heal the broken spirit and assist in the unification of Aboriginal people as true owners and partners in managing Australia and its affairs. This is about respect!

Dr Fiona Stanley, Australian of the year 2003 said quote "The history of colonisation, and its aftermath including the forced removal of children, has been the most significant reason for today's picture of Aboriginal health and other problems. The evidence is overwhelming of the effects of loss of culture, land, voice, population, parents and children".

Dr Helen Milroy Aboriginal psychiatrist states "So many Aboriginal children have a wounded soul from the layers of grief and loss, yet so many of these children can still experience the joy in life and warm our hearts"

Or one of my greatest inspirations the late and great Rob Riley quoted "You can't be wrong if you're right".

However today we acknowledge the sad dark history that will forever scar Australia and KSGAC is being productive by developing exciting and challenging ways to achieve a solid representative organization through the launch of the second and new album titled "Stealem Away". A common phrase that is used by many Aboriginal people, "Government bin stealem away, them mob". I would like to thank the artists for the great contribution of songs and lyrics to this project and acknowledge the ArtsWA for the funding that allows us to create this second album. Unfortunately we are under resourced and lack the support by major funding bodies who have failed since the inception of this organization to recognise and support the relevance of this organization in the Kimberley landscape.

Hence the awareness process by productivity of albums etc. Unfortunately we could not get the absolute complete project ready for today, but so close, due to lack of funds, staff and time, how ever we were able to have here today some copies to allow us to launch this album. You will experience some of the artists tonight live and I urge you to visit the website and purchase a copy or visit our office.

I would also like to take this time to acknowledge Mr Simon MacDonald who has worked beyond his call on CDEP, managing our office, managing projects, managing other staff and just being the rock of this organization. Thank you Simon.

I would also like to thank KRCI for the support we have had regarding CDEP even though it is interesting times ahead and I must say that without CDEP we would not be able to function as an organization.

I would like to thank my Linkup staff who have also been building this organization into a well respected service throughout the state and country and I urge those people to visit them if you are searching for family.

I would also like to acknowledge the CDEP workers who are receiving training, guidance and personal development by Simon and Senior Staff members. I ask you to give them acknowledgement in their service and dedication to this organization.

Finally I would like to thank my committee for the trust, vision and dedication you have given to me as your Chair and allowing me to work towards achieving your goals in the good spirit of building something for you and your members. The hardest part of all of this is, as you are

aware, we have no funds and support to achieve the ultimate goal but we will get there.

I would also like to wrap up by saying that my dedication to this organization has been tough and challenging but your recognition of my honesty, vision and credibility is far greater than any negative rumour, challenge or obstacle in my path that will prevent me from achieving for you, it may be slow but it will be stable.

I hope everyone here today enjoys this evening and I thank you all for coming and being part of this small event here today, especially those who have travelled great distances just to be here.

Mark Bin Bakar