



Just In Time

CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee

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Reconciliation Week 27th May - 3rd June



Introduction

During May and June we celebrate National Reconciliation Week, a time to acknowledge the past and present injustices experienced by Indigenous Australians, and a time to celebrate the many achievements and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The apology to the Stolen Generations given in Parliament in February was a long awaited Federal response to calls for an apology or a sorry statement. While we hopefully await more positive national changes under the new Australian Government, there is much that can be done by Australians on a personal level. We encourage every Australian to use Reconciliation Week 2008 to take small steps to join in the national journey towards Reconciliation.

As the famous 'Sea of Hands' installation demonstrated, the efforts of every individual can go a long way. So read on for many suggestions of ways that you can put your hand up and out for Reconciliation this 2008 National Reconciliation Week!

Sorry Day

National Sorry Day takes place on the **26th of May** – before the start of Reconciliation Week. This day of commemoration and celebration began in 1998 as one of the 54 recommendations detailed in the 'Bringing Them Home' report, a parliamentary inquiry into the Stolen Generations and the impact of the forced separation of Indigenous children from their families. While National Sorry Day has been a successful response to one of the recommendations, the majority have been overlooked.

The **National Sorry Day Committee** website is dedicated to addressing the neglected recommendations, and there are plenty of ways you can help. Follow the link below and navigate the site using the menu bar on the left side of the screen.

<http://www.nsdcc.org.au>

You can sign petitions online, calling for the education of teachers and students about the history and lasting impact of separation policies. You can also sign an online 'Sorry' pledge book and join thousands of Australians who have voiced their support for Reconciliation.

Health & Racism

In his 'sorry' speech Prime Minister Kevin Rudd noted that "It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history" and focus is now directed toward the practical measures being undertaken to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in "life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities". While these problems may seem too big to be tackled by individuals, there are significant ways that you can contribute to increased quality of life for Indigenous Australians.

ANTaR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation) and The Body Shop have recently begun a 'Racism Makes Me Sick' campaign to highlight the impact racism has on Indigenous Australians' health. Studies have revealed that 3 out of 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience racism in their daily lives. "Heart disease, premature births,

hypertension and mental illness” are the shocking effects of racism on Indigenous health.

The one positive side to these facts is that they can be changed by simple actions. So what can you do? ANTaR is asking all Australians to:

§ **Get the facts**

Arm yourself with the truth in order to counter stereotypes and discriminatory beliefs.

§ **Speak up against racism**

Don't let silence be a part of the problem, have the confidence to challenge racist remarks.

§ **Take positive steps**

Support Indigenous people by learning more about their culture and get involved in the Reconciliation process.

The ANTaR website provides fact sheets and great advice to help give you the confidence to speak up against racism in your home, workplace and amongst friends. Visit:

<http://www.antar.org.au>

You can also sign an online pledge, committing yourself to tackle racism. ANTaR hopes to reach 20,000 pledges by the end of National Reconciliation Week, so get online and become part of the solution to the Indigenous health crisis.

Intervention Update

In March HREOC (the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission) released their annual Social Justice Report, in which Tom Calma, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, presented a 10 point plan to improve the Northern Territory Intervention. The suggested amendments address the human rights abuses and racial discrimination inherent in the Intervention, which is aimed at preventing the sexual abuse of children in Indigenous communities. An official Government review will take place in July. The organisation **Women for Wik** is dedicated to monitoring the Intervention and giving voice to those negatively affected by it. You can support them by going online (see link opposite), endorsing them and signing online petitions. You are also encouraged to write to your Federal M.P. if you would like to make clear to the Government our concerns about the Intervention .

'Sorry - A New Beginning'

As in the Catholic sacrament of Reconciliation, it is only after an apology and a sincere confession of wrongs that a damaged relationship can begin to heal. It is our hope that National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week can usher in a new stage of Australian Reconciliation, lived with renewed spirit and commitment. Reconciliation is in the hands of all Australians and we hope that you feel empowered by the important role that your actions will play in this process. We encourage you to get involved in any Reconciliation Week activities occurring in your local area (see NSW Reconciliation Council link below and events page on Reconciliation Australia site) and to live the spirit of Reconciliation throughout the year.

Web Links



CLRI(NSW) recommends the following sites for more information and further links to ways that you can get involved in National Reconciliation Week.

National Sorry Day Committee

<http://www.nsdcc.org.au>

Reconciliation Australia

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au>

NSW Reconciliation Council

<http://www.nswrecon.com>

ANTaR

<http://www.antar.org.au>

'Bringing Them Home' report online:

<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/stolen>

Close the Gap

<http://www.closesthegap.com.au/action.php>

Australian Government Culture Portal

<http://www.culture.gov.au/articles/reconciliation>

Women for Wik

<http://www.womenforwik.org>

CLRI(NSW)

<http://www.clrinsw.org>

You can read past issues of Just in Time online.

Just in Time is an occasional publication of the Social Justice Committee of CLRI(NSW). Members of the committee are: Sr Jan Barnett rsj, Sr Suzette Clark rsc, Ms Sandie Cornish, Br Stephen Cram cfc, Ms Frances Egan, Sr Grace Ellul sm, Ms Jill Finnane, Fr Brian Fitzpatrick osa, Sr Margaret Hinchey rsm, Sr Geraldine Kearney sgs, Sr Anne Lane pbvm, Mr Pedro Moreira, Fr Claude Mostowik msc, Sr Kathleen O'Connor rsj, Sr Sharon Price rsm, Sr Libby Rogerson ibvm.
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