



MEDIA RELEASE

Sorry must be more than a word

Seventeen years after Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, the situation for First Nations children remains dire.

The Australian Government expressed remorse for the harrowing reality our people faced through the Stolen Generations.

But remorse is not enough.

Political leaders must do more.

The anniversary of the National Apology is not a day that we reflect upon with pride. It is a yearly reminder of the deep and distressing reality of on-going harm – of failed policies and actions resulting in more of our children than ever before being 'taken' into 'care'.

Successive governments on both sides of politics have failed to act and instead nurture a brutal status quo.

Last year the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) reported that 22,908 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care, representing 41% of all children in out-of-home care, despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children making up only 6% of the total child population in Australia.

Compared to non-First Nations children, First Nations children are 11.5 times more likely to be removed into out-of-home care as infants. In places like the Northern Territory, the government is proposing amendments to child protection laws, making it easier to remove children from their families.

If our children aren't being removed by welfare, they are being imprisoned.

The Productivity Commission reports that on an average day, nearly two-thirds of children imprisoned by state and territory governments are First Nations. First Nations children are imprisoned at almost 27 times the rate of other children.

Our children and our families are under constant surveillance and attack. We live in fear and pain.

The child protection system is broken and provides wholly inadequate protections for our children's safety. Why do governments continue to place First Nations children in this system at record rates?

Released this week, the 2024 Closing the Gap Annual Report shows business-as-usual - that the system is failing our children, our families and our communities. After 17 years of Government 'solutions', only 5 of 19 targets on track to be reached by 2031. Rates of out-of-home care, suicide and incarceration, amongst many others, are worsening.

What makes government indifference to First Nations suffering most disturbing is that First Nations-led and governed solutions exist, and there is evidence they can close the gap. They address the root cause, empower local leaders and are proven to be effective. They can protect our children and can support our families to create the conditions for care and dignity.

These solutions are deliberately ignored.

Last week the federal government announced major funding for Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory. It's heartening to see some preventative measures being funded. But those of us on the ground know that it's too little. We are still awaiting broad scale reform and investment.

Today we continue to grieve. The depth of our loss from being removed from our families, languages and cultures cannot be explained. We continue to deal with the serious, daily impact this has on our communities. We are terrified that history is repeating itself. We know this fate can be prevented for our children and grandchildren.

Australian governments can lead change and must lead change. The question is – how many more of our children will be harmed while we wait?

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