



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

National Sorry Day: Australia cannot apologise while continuing child removal

Attributable to William Tilmouth, Arrernte leader, Children's Ground Co Chair and recipient of the 2025 Human Rights Medal

National Sorry Day should force this country to confront what it is still doing to First Nations children.

This is the day we tabled the Bringing Them Home report. It is the day we recognise the Stolen Generations and the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities.

I am a survivor of the Stolen Generations. I know what forced removal does to children because I have lived through it. I know what it means to grow up disconnected from family, culture and belonging. That damage continues across generations.

Every year governments apologise for the Stolen Generations while maintaining systems that continue removing First Nations children from their families at staggering rates. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children account for around 41 per cent of all children in out of home care despite making up only around 6 per cent of the child population. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal children make up almost 90 per cent of children in out of home care.

The Bringing Them Home report laid bare the destruction caused when governments separated children from family, language, culture and Country. The country apologised for that history, but the structures behind it were never dismantled. They continued through legislation and systems designed to keep control in government hands.

Governments continue managing First Nations lives through intervention, surveillance and dependency. Communities are punished for conditions created through decades of neglect and systemic racism. Governments leave our people in overcrowded housing, our homes in unliveable condition, deny families proper healthcare and economic opportunity, and then use this created instability to justify further intervention.

These systems reshape authority inside First Nations communities. Over time, government structures determine which voices are legitimised, which solutions are funded and which forms of

leadership are allowed into the room. Home grown solutions led by communities are constrained within systems designed and controlled by government.

This is authority filtered through government approval, not self determination.

Child removal systems sit inside this broader structure. The current debate around child protection reforms in the Northern Territory exposes how quickly governments move toward greater intervention and weaker protections when communities are already living under pressure.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle exists because governments already know the catastrophic harm caused by forced removal and cultural disconnection. Weakening cultural protections inside an already failing system will only deepen that crisis.

The Northern Territory Government is responding to the failure of the child protection system by pushing further toward removal, control and assimilation. Expanding the power of a system already devastating First Nations families while refusing to address the conditions driving harm is highly dangerous and guaranteed to produce more trauma for another generation of children.

For First Nations children, culture is safety. Safety comes from strong families, stable housing, prevention and genuine community authority, not deeper intervention by a system already inflicting lifelong damage.

National Sorry Day cannot become an annual performance where governments express remorse for the Stolen Generations while another generation of First Nations children continues being drawn into systems of intervention and removal.

This country already apologised for forced removal. Continuing to reproduce the same harm against First Nations children and communities is indefensible. Australia knows the consequences of these systems. Continuing down the same path is a political choice.

At Children's Ground, we advocate for structural and systemic change that responds to the needs, authority and aspirations of communities instead of maintaining the status quo.

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