



February 13, 2008

**National Apology to the Stolen Generations an historic and hope-filled moment for
Australia**

The National Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were removed from their families under past government policies is an historic and prophetic moment in the life of the Australian nation.

The Catholic Church in Australia welcomes and affirms the apology made in the Federal Parliament today in the presence of so many of the Indigenous peoples of this land.

We recall on this day our own statement, issued in 1998, in which we sought forgiveness from the victims of the policy that broke up Indigenous families, for any part the Church played in causing them harm and suffering.

A decade on, we reaffirm the sentiments expressed in that statement, that “the Catholic Bishops of Australia wish to record our commitment to continue the healing process for the benefit of victims of the unjust policies of the past, to support the just needs of Indigenous people today and to contribute to the quest for national reconciliation”.

Today is a great day in the history of our nation because it represents a much longed-for point of arrival. But it must not end there. For true healing to take place we must also acknowledge that this National Apology is a point not only of arrival, but a point of hope and a point of departure.

Australia is a stronger nation today for having had the humility to say we are sorry that past policies were unjust and wrong, even when they were carried out with good intentions according to the prevailing attitudes of the era.

Having arrived at this point of healing, we must not fall into the trap of thinking that reconciliation is complete and our obligations as a nation are fulfilled.

Rather, we must take the hope that this Apology represents and move forward, determined to increase our efforts to improve the practical circumstances of our Indigenous brothers and sisters. This must be done by addressing the fundamental causes of entrenched disadvantage, in full consultation and collaboration with Indigenous communities. Appropriate resources must be made available to achieve real outcomes.

The Catholic Church, whose members work closely with Indigenous communities throughout Australia, will continue to assist in whatever ways possible to improve the situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples so that all Australians can live in peace and unity, with dignity and mutual respect.

Archbishop Philip Wilson,

President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference