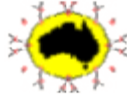


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European Network for Indigenous Australian Rights (ENIAR)

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Sorry Day 2009 – One year on from ‘Sorry’: What next?

12 May 2009 - Media Release - ENIAR will mark Sorry Day 2009 in London with a free public event, reflecting on the post-apology situation for Indigenous Australians. Whilst the Australian Government’s apology to the Stolen Generations on 13 February 2008 was cause for great celebration, many injustices still remain for Australia’s indigenous population.

Between 1910 and the mid-1970’s express State and Federal Government policy facilitated the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities to institutions or foster families with the purpose of breeding out Aboriginality. Many would never see their families again. Virtually all Indigenous families have been affected by child removal policies and the trauma and suffering continues to the present day. Indigenous Australians’ life expectancy is 17 years lower than non-Indigenous Australians, and rates of infant mortality, disease and illness and unemployment far exceed the rest of Australian society.

Since the Bringing Them Home Report of 1997, Sorry Day has been a call for a Federal Government apology to the Stolen Generations and reparations for their suffering and loss.

“Last year we celebrated what appeared to be a new beginning in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, following Prime Minister Rudd’s apology” said Gill Watson, ENIAR Coordinator, London.

“The apology was a huge step forward, however we had hoped that serious action would follow closely behind. There has been no national scheme to compensate the Stolen Generations and their families. Furthermore, the Racial Discrimination Act remains suspended so that the Northern Territory Intervention can be continued without due regard for the rights of Indigenous Territorians. Shamefully, Indigenous Australians have had to go to the UN, again, to try to have their rights respected.

“We believe it is important to continue raising awareness, in Australia and internationally, of the ongoing disadvantages suffered by Indigenous Australians.

“We invite all UK-based supporters of Indigenous Australian rights to join with us to celebrate the apology, to remember the Stolen Generations – recognise

their suffering and survival – and learn about the continuing difficulties faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” concluded Ms Watson.

Sorry Day London will be held on Thursday 28th May 2009 at Australia House, Strand, London WC2B 4LA. (Nearest tubes: Temple, Covent Garden, Holborn). Drinks & light snacks from 6pm, programme begins at 6.30pm.

The event is free however it is necessary to RSVP, as Australia House requires a list of all attendees for all events. Those planning or hoping to attend should email info@eniar.org with “Sorry Day RSVP” in the subject field. Please note that you will not be permitted entry unless you have emailed your details by 9am on Thursday 28th May, therefore if in doubt, email!

Programme (provisional)

6 – 6.30pm: Drinks & nibbles

6.30pm: Welcome and summary of event program

6.45 – 8pm: Screening of *Liyarn Ngarn*

8 – 8.30pm: Dr Damien Short, Senior Lecturer in human rights at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, will speak on the topic ‘*When Sorry Isn’t Good Enough: Australia’s “Stolen Generations” & Reconciliation*’

8.30 – 9pm: Questions

9 – 9.30pm: Attendees can circulate & chat informally with each other, the speakers and event organisers. There will also be an information display and an opportunity to sign ENIAR’s Sorry Book.

9.30pm: Sorry Day London closes.

Note to Editors

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia. They now number over 460,000, 2.4% of the population. Evidence of Aboriginal inhabitation goes back over 60,000 years. They suffered violence and dispossession after British colonisation and their full rights to citizenship were not legally recognised until the 1960s. Various forms of discrimination persist today.

Sorry Day remembers the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families from the first days of European occupation of Australia until the 1970s. Up to 100,000 children were removed between 1910 and 1970; between 10% and 30% of all Aboriginal children. Most were brought up in State and Church institutions, where they were denied contact with their families, the use of their languages and the practice of their culture.

'Sorry Day' was launched in 1998, after publication of a report 'Bringing Them Home', on the history and repercussions for the stolen children. The report concluded that not one Indigenous family had escaped the effects of the policy and that forcible removal was an act of genocide. It made 54 recommendations, few of which have been implemented. But in 2008 the new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, responded to long pressure by making a formal apology for this and other harm done by Government agencies to Australia's Indigenous peoples..

Liyarn Ngarn is a privately funded documentary which brought together the British actor, Pete Postlethwaite, with the Indigenous songwriter Archie Roach and Aboriginal leader Pat Dodson. They journey through Australia's outback and historical past in an effort to change people's perceptions and attitudes towards indigenous people.

In the language of the Yawaru people, from the West Kimberly region around Broome, Liyarn Ngarn means 'the coming together of the spirit'. It recognises common fate, and connects an individual to family, to country and to spirit. The impetus for the film was the death of Bill Johnson's adopted Aboriginal son, Louis St John, who was murdered on his 19th birthday, allegedly "because he was black."

Dr Damien Short is a Senior Lecturer in human rights at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London and Convener of the MA Understanding and Securing Human Rights. He has published many articles on indigenous peoples, reconciliation and 'native title' land rights. A monograph titled *Reconciliation and Colonial Power: Indigenous Rights in Australia* (Aldershot: Ashgate) was published in March 2008. He is currently working on a new monograph titled 'Genocides?' for Zed Books.

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