

Apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants, Parliament of Australia

16 November 2009 – 16 November 2009

URL:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/national_apology/index

Details

On 16 November 2009, the Australian Parliament issued an apology to Forgotten Australians and former child migrants.

The Apology in November 2009 was an endorsement of Recommendation 1 from the 'Forgotten Australians' report of 2004, which read:

That the Commonwealth Government issue a formal statement acknowledging, on behalf of the nation, the hurt and distress suffered by many children in institutional care, particularly the children who were victims of abuse and assault; and apologising for the harm caused to these children.

In 2005, the Federal Government made the following response to this recommendation:

The Australian Government has great sympathy for those children who suffered hurt and distress in institutional care. While it would not be appropriate for the Australian Government to issue an apology for a matter for which it does not have responsibility, the Government expresses its sincere regret that these children were placed in situations where they did not receive the care they deserved ...

The Federal Government adopted a new policy on apologising to Forgotten Australians with the election of the Rudd Labor government in 2007. This is the text of the formal apology made by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 16 November 2009 in the Great Hall of Parliament House, Canberra:

Today, the Government of Australia will move the following motion of apology in the Parliament of Australia.

We come together today to deal with an ugly chapter in our nation's history.

And we come together today to offer our nation's apology.

To say to you, the Forgotten Australians, and those who were sent to our shores as children without your consent, that we are sorry.

Sorry – that as children you were taken from your families and placed in institutions where so often you were abused.

Sorry – for the physical suffering, the emotional starvation and the cold absence of love, of tenderness, of care.

Sorry – for the tragedy, the absolute tragedy, of childhoods lost, - childhoods spent instead in austere and authoritarian places, where names were replaced by numbers, spontaneous play by regimented routine, the joy of learning by the repetitive drudgery of menial work.

Sorry – for all these injustices to you, as children, who were placed in our care.

As a nation, we must now reflect on those who did not receive proper care.

We look back with shame that many of you were left cold, hungry and alone and with nowhere to hide and nobody to whom to turn.

We look back with shame that so many of you were left cold, hungry and alone and with nowhere to hide and with nobody, absolutely nobody, to whom to turn.

We look back with shame that many these little ones who were entrusted to institutions and foster homes instead, were abused physically, humiliated cruelly, violated sexually.

And we look back with shame at how those with power were allowed to abuse those who had none.

And how then, as if this was not injury enough, you were left ill-prepared for life outside – left to fend for yourselves; often unable to read or write; to struggle alone with no friends and no family.

For these failures to offer proper care to the powerless, the voiceless and the most vulnerable, we say sorry.

We reflect too today on the families who were ripped apart simply because they had fallen on hard times. Hard times brought about by illness, by death and by poverty.

Some simply left destitute when fathers damaged by war could no longer cope.

Again, we say sorry for the extended families you never knew.

We acknowledge the particular pain of children shipped to Australia as child migrants – robbed of your families, robbed of your homeland, regarded not as innocent children but regarded instead as a source of child labour.

To those of you who were told you were orphans, brought here without your parents' knowledge or consent, we acknowledge the lies you were told, the lies told to your mothers and fathers, and the pain these lies have caused for a lifetime.

To those of you separated on the dockside from your brothers and sisters; taken alone and unprotected to the most remote parts of a foreign land – we acknowledge today that the laws of our nation failed you.

And for this we are deeply sorry.

We think also today of all the families of these Forgotten Australians and former child migrants who are still grieving, families who were never reunited, families who were never reconciled, families who were lost to one another forever.

We reflect too on the burden that is still carried by our own children, your own children, your grandchildren, your husbands, your wives, your partners and your friends – and we thank them for the faith, the love and the depth of commitment that has helped see you through the valley of tears that was not of your own making.

And we reflect with you as well, in sad remembrance, on those who simply could not cope and who took their own lives in absolute despair.

We recognise the pain you have suffered.

Pain is so very, very personal.

Pain is so profoundly disabling.

So, let us together, as a nation, allow this apology to begin to heal this pain.

Healing the pain felt by so many of the half a million of our fellow Australians who were children in care – children in our care.

And let us also resolve this day that this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation's story.

A turning point for shattered lives.

A turning point for governments at all levels and of every political hue and colour to do all in our power to never let this happen again.

For the protection of children is the sacred duty of us all.

Gallery



Australia apology over abuse in state shelters - 16 Nov 09

Description: Al Jazeera's Michelle Stone reports on the apology to 'forgotten Australians' and former child migrants.



Former child migrants: Jon Holmes, John Merrigan and Maurice Crawford-Raby

Description: This image was included on the Forgotten Australians - Our History website, on the Apology page.



Trish Charter and Gail Favaloro

Description: This image was included on the Forgotten Australians - Our History website, on the Apology page.



Graeme Bradley and Kevin Parker

Description: This image was included on the Forgotten Australians - Our History website, on the Apology page.



Apology and address from the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd MP

Description: This image was included on the Forgotten Australians - Our History website, on the Apology page.



Forgotten Australians, during formal proceedings of the National Apology.

Description: Later, flowers were laid in remembrance of those who had passed away. 'Anecdotal evidence has shown an abnormally large percentage of suicides among care leavers' (The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Forgotten Australians, 2004, xvi).



Guests in the Great Hall, Parliament House, during the apology and address from the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd MP.

Description: This image was included on the Forgotten Australians - Our History website, on the Apology page.



Invitation from Kevin Rudd and Jenny Macklin to the National Apology to the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants, Parliament House 16 November 2009.



Forgotten Australians enter the Great Hall, Parliament House

Description: This image was included on the Forgotten Australians - Our History website, on the Apology page.



Children's homes: a selection of images of Australian children's homes and institutions

Description: This video features photographs of children's homes and institutions in the public record. It was produced for the National Museum of Australia's 'Inside' exhibition, November 2011.



Prime Minister says sorry

Description: The Parliament of Australia issued a national apology to the Forgotten Australians on 16 November 2009. 'Prime Minister says sorry' is a video of then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivering that apology to Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants in the Great Hall of Parliament House in Canberra.

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Inquiry Into Child Migration, Parliament of Australia \(2000 - 2001\)](#)
- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)
The Apology on 16 November 2009 was an endorsement of Recommendation 1 from the 'Forgotten Australians' report of the Inquiry into Institutional Care.
- [Inquiry into the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports, Parliament of Australia \(2008 - 2009\)](#)
- [Apology to Forgotten Australians and Child Migrants, Parliament of New South Wales \(19 September 2009\)](#)
The Australian Parliamentary Apology followed the NSW Apology.

Related Organisations

- [Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc. \(1990 - current\)](#)
- [Care Leavers Australia Network \(2000 - current\)](#)
- [Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australian government \(2007 - 2013\)](#)
- [Now-Remembered Australians Inc \(2009 - current\)](#)
Now-Remembered Australians was formed after a trip to Canberra to see the Australian Parliamentary Apology.

Related Archival Collections

- [Barnardos Australia, Records \(c. 1883 - current\)](#)
- [Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\], National Library of Australia \(2009 - 2012\)](#)

Related Legislation

- [Aged Care Act, Commonwealth of Australia \(1997\)](#)

Related Concepts

- [Child Migration \(1800s - 1970s\)](#)

Resources

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- Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat, Parliament of Australia, [Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Revisited: Report on the progress with the implementation of the recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports](#), 2009
- Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat, Parliament of Australia, [Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children](#), 2004
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- National Museum of Australia, [Inside: Life in Children's Homes and Institutions](#), 2011
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- Department of Health, Australian Government, [Caring for Forgotten Australians, Former Child Migrants and Stolen Generations Information Package](#), 2016
- [Joanna Penglase interviewed by Susan Marsden in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 2 June 2010
- [Allan Allaway interviewed by Rob Willis in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 9 August 2010
- [James Luthy interviewed by Hamish Sewell in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), 4 July 2011

- [*Yoonthalla Close interviewed by Anne Monsour in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]*](#), 5 July 2011
 - [*Phileppa Doyle interviewed by Virginia Macleod for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]*](#), 25 April 2012 - 26 April 2012
 - [*Marie Wood interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]*](#), 13 May 2010
 - [*Michael Snell interviewed by Rob Willis in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]*](#), 17 November 2009
 - [*Charlie Walker interviewed by Rob Willis in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]*](#), 23 February 2010
 - [*Ken Merton interviewed by Lesley Alves in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \(28 October 2011\)*](#), 28 October 2011
 - Parry, Naomi, [*Federal Government Apologises For Child Abuse*](#), newmatilda.com, 16 November 2009
 - Turnbull, Malcolm, *Malcolm Turnbull apology to Forgotten Australians*, The Australian, 16 November 2009
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