

## Section F: News

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### Australian Reconciliation Convention — Seminar Sessions

#### *Schools and Education*

Chair: Dr Ken Boston, Director General of the NSW Department of School Education

The contribution of schools and education is crucial in achieving understanding and respect, enabling reconciliation to advance.

The objective of this seminar was to explore how schools and education might contribute to the renewal of the nation through building better relationships between Indigenous Australians and the wider community.

#### *Propositions accepted by seminar participants*

The Australian Reconciliation Convention:

- calls for the introduction of mandatory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in all primary and secondary schools, and in post secondary institutions;
- supports the development and implementation of education curricula and programs which seek to eliminate racist attitudes and practices, and promote cross-cultural understanding and recording of Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories;
- supports the introduction of a mandatory accredited cultural awareness training for practising teachers; and
- supports the adoption by all school systems across Australia of measures to achieve outcomes for Indigenous students. □

#### *The Stolen Generations*

Chair: Sir Ronald Wilson, president of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

The forced removal of Aboriginal children occurred in every State and Territory of Australia. The children were taken under government policies

aimed at encouraging as many Aboriginal people as possible to adopt European culture and behaviour. The assimilation policy presumed that over time Aboriginal people would die out.

These government practices separated thousands of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. The pain of separation is well within the living memory of many Aboriginal families and



Dr Mary Ann Bin Sallik, Associate Professor, Aboriginal & Islander Studies, University of South Australia.

across multiple generations. The communities in which Indigenous people live are still affected by the pain of separation and its impact on family and cultural life.

The objective of this seminar was to explore how dealing with the legacy of the stolen generations might contribute to the renewal of the nation.

**Propositions accepted by seminar participants**

The Australian Reconciliation Convention calls for:

- the Government to fund a program to promote public discussion and understanding of the stolen generations inquiry and the implementation of its recommendations;
- the unqualified acknowledgement and apology by all parliaments of the past and continuing impact on Indigenous families and people of past policies of forced removal of children from their parents and families; and
- support and resources to be provided to organisations involved with assisting Indigenous people to rebuild their lives and overcome the disadvantages suffered as a result of past policies of forced removal of children from their parents and families.

**Editor's note:** For a personal account by a Nyungar woman of her childhood spent at Roelands Mission in Western Australia after being taken away from her family, please see Irene Calgaret's paper in the Conference Section of this issue. □

**Australians for Reconciliation**

The Council has established a network of Australians for Reconciliation (AFR) coordinators across Australia.

The Coordinators help communities to advance the Council's vision, to improve relationships and disseminate information about reconciliation.

The two most frequently asked questions of AFR coordinators are: What can we do? and How can I become involved in the Reconciliation movement? The AFR coordinators offer these suggestions:

- Contact your State/Territory AFR coordinator. During office hours you can contact each AFR office on a toll free number (see below). The coordinators will provide you with information and resources about reconciliation and information on how to join Reconciliation Support Groups or Study Circles in your area.

- Consider how you can best support reconciliation. You may choose to join an existing support group to learn more about reconciliation or you may even decide to establish your own group. These groups meet and discuss how to advance reconciliation in your area.
- Commit to being an Australian for Reconciliation. Making a commitment to the reconciliation process may sound a little sentimental but by making a pledge you will give yourself the opportunity to think about what reconciliation means to you and what you can do to advance it.
- Act to take some individual responsibility for advancing Reconciliation.
  - Talk to others, your family, friends and work colleagues about reconciliation and how to advance it within your community.
  - Order and distribute reconciliation resources at your workplace, club, faith group or school.
  - Organise an eight-week Study Circle for 6-10 people. Study Circles kits can be ordered from your AFR coordinator.
  - Provide a reconciliation information stall at events such as fairs and fetes, conferences and exhibitions and other special events and gatherings. Your AFR coordinator can help you plan and order materials.



Mick Dodson (left) and Sir Ronald Wilson.

- Lobby your local council to promote reconciliation, for example to fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags during National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC week and on other special occasions.
- Consider drafting a formal Statement of Reconciliation for your organisation, recreation, faith or other group.
- Become aware of the key issues of reconciliation and think about those issues that can be advanced by you or your group.
- Reconciliation is about sharing history. Find out about the Indigenous history of your area. Ask a local Indigenous person to come and talk to you and your group about the Indigenous history of your region.
- Ask your local school if they have talked with your AFR coordinator about what schools can do to advance reconciliation. Many students, both primary and secondary, across Australia have participated in activities such as painting, writing stories and inviting local Indigenous people to their school to learn about the dream stories and indigenous history of their area.
- Many small businesses exhibit posters and distribute reconciliation materials from reception and customer areas. Call an AFR coordinator if you require any assistance.
- Local governments across Australia have played a positive role in advancing reconciliation in their area. For example, some local governments have established their own reconciliation committees — forging relationships, developing local agreements, identifying local Indigenous

For further information and Council materials contact Australians for Reconciliation Coordinator in your State or Territory:

ACT	1800 804 330
NSW	1800 060 266
NT	1800 060 268
QLD	1800 060 267
SA	1800 060 270
TAS	1800 659 363
VIC	1800 060 265
WA	1800 060 269

history and heroes, displaying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on appropriate occasions and making available reconciliation materials in government offices.

- Faith groups throughout the nation have established Study Circle groups to talk to each other about reconciliation and what the group can do to advance it.

Reconciliation starts with you. Remember that regardless of what you do, big or small, it all counts. If you need more ideas or just to talk to someone about reconciliation, contact your local AFR coordinator. We are more than happy to assist.

**Editor's note:** These items have been extracted from the proceedings of the Australian Reconciliation Convention which was held from 26-28 May in

Melbourne with more than 1800 people from around Australia participating in the event. The Editors wish to acknowledge The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and *Walking Together*, Number 19, August 1997, for allowing us to reprint this information here. □

### ***Breaking Down Language Barriers in the Top End***

Coping with a communication problem is hard enough for anyone, but for some Aboriginal children living in outback Australia, it has been extraordinarily hard until recently.

Isolation, limited access to speech pathologists, and inappropriate cultural and linguistic testing materials have all played a part in making life difficult for the many Aboriginal communities living in and around the Katherine area, which has one of the highest incidences of cleft palate in Australia. Now the Katherine Regional Aboriginal Language Centre (KRALC) has come to the rescue. KRALC, run by an all-Aboriginal committee, records, researches and documents languages in the Katherine Region. Their task also extends to language maintenance, teaching and training.