



PRIME MINISTER

84/93

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DAY

Today is one of our key national days.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander day is the day on which we celebrate the rich and ancient indigenous history and culture of our country. It is the day on which we contemplate the achievements of the people who lived in this country and cared for it for 50,000 years or more, and whose descendants suffered dispossession, prejudice and brutality after European settlement and yet survived, and today continue to make a great contribution to our national life.

This year the Day has extra significance, not only because it is the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, but because it is a year in which Australia is confronting as never before its obligations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The legacy of injustice towards the indigenous people of Australia is in many ways a shameful one. But feelings of shame or guilt or outrage are not necessary to feel that things must change. Pride in Australia is all that we require.

Our international reputation, our self-esteem, our integrity require that we find answers to the prejudice and injustice and other problems which indigenous Australians continue to confront.

The High Court's decision on Native Title gives us a vital stepping stone towards finding these answers.

Today we should reaffirm our intention to build on that foundation: to put aside prejudice and fear and guilt and, taking pride in the heritage of indigenous Australians, commit ourselves to making reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians one of the strengths of our society, one of the measures of our democracy, one of the hallmarks of our belief in Australia.

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