



PRIME MINISTER

77/95

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The first International Day of Indigenous People is a time for all Australians to reflect on the position of indigenous people in our society -- on past injustices, on recent achievements, and on our hopes for a better future together.

Our goal is to encourage Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate fully in the life of the nation while maintaining their own unique cultures and identities.

In my speech at Redfern in December 1992, I acknowledged the many injustices of the past 200 years. As we have begun to recognise and acknowledge these injustices, so have we begun to redress them.

The Native Title Act of 1993 was a watershed for the nation. It enshrined in law the rights of native title newly recognised by the High Court in its Mabo judgment, and provided mechanisms to allow those rights to be determined.

The Government also established a Land Fund to make it possible for the many indigenous people unable to prove native title to buy land. This Fund will provide nearly \$1.5 billion over 10 years and will give many dispossessed indigenous people a real base and a stake in the nation's future.

The Government is examining further social justice measures for indigenous peoples, as the third stage of our response to the High Court's Mabo judgment. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country have been consulted on how best the Government can ensure equity for indigenous people within the structures and institutions of our society.

The Commonwealth Government is acutely aware of the disadvantage indigenous peoples suffer.

The poor health of many indigenous Australians compared with the total population causes particular concern. Over the last 12 years, in a bid to improve the general social conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we have taken steady and consistent budgetary and administrative action which has led to lasting improvements in employment, housing and education.

Nevertheless, we recognise the need for further improvements in these areas, and especially in the health of indigenous people, to redress the disadvantages still suffered by indigenous Australians.

Earlier policies of child removal have been tragic for countless indigenous families. The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission are launching a National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children so that we may know the full implications of these distressing past policies and be able to consider ways to deal with the often very sad outcomes.

Alongside these specific policy initiatives, the nation has embarked on a process of reconciliation between indigenous Australians and the wider community. We must not fail in the aim of achieving a lasting reconciliation by the centenary of Federation in 2001. Australia is a successful multicultural society, and integral to our identity is the position of the first peoples of our country.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has adopted as its vision:

A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

This vision is in tune with Australia's national ethos of a fair go for all. Together we can make this vision a reality.

CANBERRA
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