



Speech by

**Mr T. SULLIVAN**

**MEMBER FOR CHERMSIDE**

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Hansard 26 May 1999

### STOLEN GENERATION

**Mr SULLIVAN** (Chermside—ALP) (4.05 p.m.): In rising to support this motion, I acknowledge the traditional inhabitants on whose land this Parliament stands. Some people question why, as individuals or as a community, we should apologise for our own actions or for the actions of other people that have adversely affected a third party. The answer is simple. In almost every family on earth, among the first words taught to children are "I love you", "thanks" and "sorry". That is because love, gratitude and forgiveness are basic human emotions and needs.

Members opposite like to garner support for their views from the Bible. For Christians, the New Testament—in the Gospels, the Acts and the Letters—proclaims in clear, unequivocal terms the need for sorrow, repentance and reconciliation.

There are many recent examples of acts of public sorrow delivered by significant individuals and Governments. In New Zealand, the Crown, on behalf of all New Zealanders, offered its formal statement of apology to the Maori peoples. As a fax from the New Zealand High Commission to my brother Mick this morning confirms, this document was signed by the Queen on her last visit to New Zealand. I invite the committed monarchists opposite to follow the example of Queen Elizabeth II—the person to whom every member of this House has sworn allegiance. I invite them to join her in apologising for past wrongs.

In Canada last year, the Canadian Government apologised to the native peoples for Governments' actions that have destroyed indigenous families, homes, communities and nations. Phil Fontaine, President of the Assembly of First Nations, accepted the apology on behalf of all Canadian indigenous people. In October 1998, Japan's Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi offered an unusually frank apology for Japan's occupation of the Korean Peninsula. This was seen as a crucial step in restoring good relations between Japan and South Korea.

On 16 March 1998, in a major document on the Holocaust, the Catholic Church urged Roman Catholics to repent for past errors in their treatment and blaming of Jews. In a statement that had the full backing of the Pope, the spokesman for the Vatican, the Australian Cardinal Edward Clancy called this document "more than an apology". He called on Christians to ensure that this sort of atrocity never happens again.

Last November saw relations between China and Japan cool considerably when Japan would not offer a written apology for its shameful actions when it invaded China. We all know that the lack of an apology says just as much about a person as their willingness to say sorry.

The American Congress has apologised to the American Red Indian nations. In June 1997, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, on the sesquicentenary of the Irish potato famine, apologised for the policies and practices of previous British Governments and their treatment of the Irish people. Saying sorry is as natural as eating and breathing. Today I offer my unreserved apology, and that of my family, to Aboriginal Australians.

On 7 February last year, my family gathered in King George Square to be part of the Journey Home program. At one significant stage in the ceremony, participants were invited to ask for and accept forgiveness. My wife, children and I were embraced by and embraced Aboriginal men, women and children whom we had never met before but who were prepared to take one small step to help bring

black and white communities together. I can still remember the comments of some of the people whom I met on that occasion. They had courage and strength in their eyes, they had borne the pain over the years and they were teaching me a lesson. That significant civic event has not dissolved the problems faced by indigenous and white Australians, but it was an important first step to bring about a change of heart within our community.

A ceremony held in Kalinga Park a month later brought local families together to celebrate the journey home for the stolen generation. The forgiveness and acceptance shared on that occasion stands as a reminder and encouragement to us to continue along this difficult and demanding journey.

I ask members of the Parliament and our constituents who have children to put themselves in that position. How would they feel if a foreign nation invaded us, gained control of our society and then took away our children? Would they not also be a broken parent? Would they not also turn to alcohol, drug abuse or to some other form of self-harm if their own children were taken from them? What amazes me is how well the indigenous people of Australia have survived in spite of their treatment. Today on this National Sorry Day I offer my unreserved apologies to indigenous Australians. I support the motion.

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