

**A transcript of the apology by *Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd* to the  
Forgotten Australians and former child migrants on 16<sup>th</sup> November  
2009 at 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.

This is the motion that later this day this Government will commend to the Parliament of Australia.

Care leavers from around Australia and abroad;

Representatives of the Care Leavers of Australia Network;

the Child Migrants Trust;

the Alliance for Forgotten Australians;

the Leader of the Opposition;

my ministerial and parliamentary colleagues;

representatives of the state governments of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria;

Her Excellency the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom;

His Excellency the Ambassador of Ireland;

His Excellency High Commissioner for Malta;

ladies and Gentlemen;

friends, one and all;

Our purpose today in this Great Hall of this great Australian Parliament is to begin to put right a very great wrong.

To acknowledge the great wrong that has been done to so many of our children.

And as a nation, to apologise for this great wrong.

And, as a nation, to resolve that such systematic abuse should never happen again.

The truth is this is an ugly story.

And its ugliness must be told without fear or favour if we are to confront fully the demons of our past.

And in so doing, animate, once again, the better angels of our human nature.

I believe we do a disservice to those who have been the victims of abuse if in any way we seek to gloss things over.

Because the truth is great evil has been done.

And therefore hard things must be said about how this was all possible in this country of the fair go.

Unless we are now transparent about what has been done in our nation's name, our apology can never be complete.

Because let us be clear - these children, both from home and abroad, were placed in care under the auspices of the state, validated by the laws of the land.

It is estimated that more than 500,000 children were placed in care under various arrangements over the course of the last century.

This is no small number.

Let us imagine that more than half of the city of Adelaide was drawn from children who had been placed in institutional or foster care.

This is no small number.

In recent weeks, it has been my privilege to meet some of these children, most of them now middle-aged.

And some perhaps a little older again.

And I take the intervention from the floor - some younger than that again.

Here is something of their stories as told to me.

Last week I sat down with Garry for a cup of tea at his home here in Canberra.

Garry told me he had five brothers and sisters.

His father was an ex-serviceman who, in Gary's words, drank himself to death.

When Garry was four or five, he remembers being taken to the steps of the local police station with his brothers and sisters and told to wait until his mum returned, who had promised ice creams for all.

She never returned.

As Garry recalls, "I never got my ice-cream".

A fortnight later, he was committed as a ward of the state.

He told me his twin brothers had been fostered to a good family in Wollongong.

But he was taken to an institution and separated from his sisters, who were placed elsewhere.

All this, at the age of four or five.

Alone, absolutely alone, devastatingly alone in the world.

He told me that, at the age of six or seven, he tried to hang himself from the swings because he wanted to be with his brothers.

He was later placed in a rural home for older boys where he remained until the age of thirteen.

He remembers being picked up from the train station on a freezing night in a big red truck with a row of numbered seats. He was told to sit in seat number 3.

He was given, a number.

As Garry said, “my number was always three, it sticks in your head”.

The culture of this home, as Garry described it, was one of institutional violence as boys were made to beat each other, to beat other boys to the ground, in front of their peers.

At 13, he was transferred to an institution where he remembers a kindly cook taking him under her wing.

But it was during this time Garry says, he suffered sexual abuse from other men.

Garry later got into drugs to help escape the psychological torture he suffered through years of what was so-called institutional care.

Garry has led a tough life.

But Garry is a survivor.

He proudly introduced me to his seven beautiful children – all doing well at school and the older ones already planning for their future.

And showed me with pride the carpenter’s trade certificate he earned through study in 2005.

When asked by CLAN (a community organisation established to help survivors of institutional abuse, and known to so many of you here today) when asked by CLAN to write down his story Garry said, “what am I going to write down, you can’t put tears on paper”.

It has also been my privilege to sit down with twins Robyn and Judy last Monday when I was in Bathurst.

They told me too, that their mother left home when they too were barely five years old. They were then placed in a church home.

Judy remembers the day they were first taken to the home and her sister Robyn bolted from the gate and ran away. They later found her and dragged her back.

Robyn and Judy remember that they kept waiting and waiting for just someone, someone to come and pick them up - but no-one, no-one ever came.

They recall being hit with belt buckles and bamboo.

They said the place they grew up in was utterly, utterly loveless.

They said it always made them feel like second-class citizens.

At the local school, they were described as "Home Girls".

They looked with envy as other children were picked up by their parents after school.

Robyn told me that, forty years later, "it stays with you, I still dream about it".

But you know something? Both Robyn and Judy too are fighters.

While emotionally scarred by their experience, they too have beautiful children and partners who care for them. But the wounds run deep. They run very deep.

And then there was Gus.

I spoke to Gus on the phone, he is from Queensland.

Brought out to Australia from Ireland, again at the age of four or five, in the 1950s – as a child apparently born out of wedlock, having earlier spent time in a Catholic institution in Ireland.

Gus' story was truly horrific. His was a tale of physical and sexual abuse over more than a decade. In Gus' words, "that did me terrible mental damage".

He finally tracked down his mum, ten years ago.

She had gone to the United States. But he then discovered she had passed away.

Gus had limited educational opportunities and has been in and out of gaol a number of times during his life.

Gus, reflecting back across the years, and in the great tradition of Australian understatement, said he had led a 'colourful life'.

Gus too, is a fighter and survivor.

Whether it is Garry or Gus or Robyn or Judy, there is an eerie similarity to so many of the stories. Stories of physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

Stories of the lack of love. Experiences which stay with them to this day.

Each told me that such was the trauma they experienced in institutional care that they suffered such things as bed-wetting for many, many years – while in care.

This, of course, is deeply personal. Deeply, deeply personal.

But each wanted me to share this part of their story too because it underlined the trauma they had gone through.

But trauma with an ugly double-twist because each time this happened, they were publicly humiliated and publicly punished by those supposedly responsible for their care.

In the conversations I was privileged to have with these great Australian survivors, for each of them this apology today was important.

And for countless thousands and tens of thousands besides, this apology is important.

Important because it does not seek to hide that which they experienced.

An apology that acknowledges the very personal pain that has been caused.

An apology which, it is hoped, will bring some healing balm to wounded souls.

And not just to the handful that I have been so honoured to meet.

But to all those whose cases are reflected in the Senate reports over many, many years. And to those also whose stories will remain forever untold.

There are tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of these stories, each as important as the other, each with its own hurts, its own humiliations its own traumas – and each united by the experience of a childhood without love, of childhood alone.

For some, this has become a very public journey of healing. For others, it remains intensely private – not even to be discussed with closest family and friends even today.

And such privacy must of course, be respected.

Whatever your journey today, and whether you are here in Parliament House in Canberra with us or watching or listening across the country or across the world, my hope today is to reach out to you all on behalf of this nation, Australia, and to speak what has so often been unspoken.

And to offer you this profound apology.

To apologise for the pain that has been caused.

To apologise for the failure to offer proper care.

To apologise for those who have gone before us and ignored your cries for help.

Because children, it seems, were not to be believed.

Only those in authority, it seems, were the ones to be believed.

To apologise for denying you basic life opportunities; including so often a decent education.

To apologise also, for just how long it has taken for the Australian Government to say sorry – so many Senate reports, nearly a decade of deliberation, and a unanimous recommendation that the Commonwealth apologise.

And finally we do so today.

Today is also a day for all those who have refused to remain silent.

The champions of this day.

Those driven by sheer tenacity.

By an unswerving sense of justice.

Those who kept the flame of hope alight.

People like Margaret Humphreys, people like Harold Haig, people like Leonie Sheedy and Joanna Penglase, people like Bonnie Djuric, and People like Walter Tusyn who campaigned tirelessly for this day as Tasmanian representative of the Alliance for Forgotten Australians, only to pass away on the 30th of last month.

And people like former Senator Andrew Murray, because Andrew Murray's work has simply been extraordinary.

I rang Andrew recently and asked him about the importance of this apology.

His response was succinct when he wrote in reply:

“the Senate (and others) have carefully examined these matters and rightly and unanimously recommended an official Commonwealth apology. As a result, the states and the main churches, charities and agencies have apologised (although some are better apologies than others...),

Andrew Murray continued “it is time for the Commonwealth to complete the circle.”

It is also important today to honour the advocacy groups who have stood by you through thick and thin – advocacy groups such as: Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN); groups like The Child Migrants Trust, advocacy groups such as the Alliance for Forgotten Australians – and many, many others.

But beyond these individuals and organisations stand an army of people who have quietly gone about their business over the last decade or more to take this story of sustained institutional and personal abuse from the margins of government deliberation to the very centre of Government consideration.

For all victims of abuse, today, you are all owed a profound debt of gratitude for having stood by them with such solidarity and strength.

So what then is to be done?

The Australian Government has assembled a comprehensive response to recommendations contained in the two Senate reports – “Lost Innocence” and “Forgotten Australians revisited”.

This response will be tabled in the Parliament in the coming days.

The overwhelming message I have received and Minister Macklin has been receiving has been the need to be heard, the need to be acknowledged and the need for the nation to apologise.

It is important however, that this not be regarded as a single point in history. Our view is that it would be helpful for the nation, however painful, to properly record your experiences, where you deem that to be appropriate.

This can assist the nation to learn from your experiences.

As a result, the Australian Government is supporting projects with both the National Library and the National Museum which will provide future generations with a solemn reminder of the past.

To ensure not only that your experiences are heard, but also that they will never ever be forgotten.

And in doing so we must always remember the advice of the sages – that a nation that forgets its past is condemned to relive it.

Second, we also know that you are deeply concerned about practical support to help survivors and their families negotiate what can still so often be damaged lives.

For example, I know many of you are concerned about living in aged care facilities as you grow older and the need for access to proper aged care.

The Government will identify care leavers as a special-needs group for aged-case purposes, to ensure that providers are assisted to provide care that is appropriate and responsive, and provide a range of further counselling and support services.

Third, many Forgotten Australians and child migrants continue to need help in tracing their families. That is why we'll be providing a National Find and Connect Service that will provide Australia-wide coordinated family tracing and support services for care leavers to locate personal and family history files and the reunite with members of their families, where that is possible.

The service will provide a national database that will collate and index existing state identified records into a national searchable data base, accessible to

state and other care leaver services and also directly to care leavers themselves.

Fourth, to make sure you are well represented, we have provided and continue to provide funding to advocacy groups such as the Child Migrant Trust, the Alliance for Forgotten Australians and Care Leavers of Australia Network, as these organisations continue to work hard to put your concerns front and centre.

Finally, governments must continue to commit to the systematic auditing, inspection and quality assurance of the child protection services they administer today.

Some 28,000 – 30,000 children are currently in the care of State and Territory Governments around Australia. Governments must put in place every protection possible to reduce the risk of mistreatment in the future.

And, as Andrew Murray reminded me recently,

“if you hurt a child, a harmed adult will often result...aggregate those adults who were harmed in care and the social, the economic, the personal cost is huge”.

In Andrew’s words, we must do everything possible to break the cycle.

I recognise this is a difficult, complex and sensitive area of policy. But the nation must continue to lift its game in doing whatever practicably can be done to provide for the proper protection of little ones, of children.

Let us, therefore today in this Great Hall of this great Australian Parliament, seize this day and see this national apology to our Forgotten Australians and our Child Migrants as a turning point for the future.

For child migrants, for many of you, your mothers and fathers were alive and were made to relinquish their right to be your parents and to watch you grow into adulthood.

Some of you have said you would like to place the apology on the graves of your mothers and fathers back in England and on their graves here in this country as well. Today we dedicate this apology to them as well.

For the Australian-born care leavers, or 'Homies' or 'State Wards' or the 'Foster kids', the Senate named you the 'Forgotten Australians'.

Today, and from this day forward, it is my hope that you will be called the 'Remembered Australians'.

However, whatever I might say today, the truth is, I cannot give you back your childhood. I cannot rewind the clock on your suffering. Nor can I erase the past.

But what I can do with you is celebrate the spirit that has lived within you over the decades. A spirit that has stubbornly refused to be beaten.

A spirit that has turned you into the survivors that you are. The spirit that has enabled you to serve your country in times of war, even if you had been deserted by your country.

The spirit that enabled you to bring up families, despite the broken families from which you came. The spirit that enabled you to work and to make your own contribution to this, our land Australia.

And the spirit that caused you to hold fast that one day you would be heard, one day you would be believed, one day you would be acknowledged.

And that, one day, Australia's sense of a fair-go would finally prevail. That our fair go would be extended to you, and that the nation would offer you the public apology that you deserve.

My message to you today is that that day has finally come.

Let me also say this.

You were in no way to blame for what happened to you because it was the nation who failed you.

The institutions the nation created for your care, failed you.

To all of you here today in this Great Hall. To all of you watching around the nation.

Today is your day. Today is your special day. Today is your achievement.

This morning, I spoke to a 98 year old lady in my electorate in Brisbane.

Her name is Vera. If Vera is watching, 'hi Vera'.

I'm sorry that Vera can't be with us in Canberra today.

She said that the pain that she suffered having spent five years in a Queensland orphanage was pain suffered a lifetime ago.

But her hope that today, as a 98 year old lady is that finally this day could herald a closing of the book on the past.

Today is for people just like Vera.

And today let us now go forward together, go forward with confidence, go forward with confidence into the future – as equal, as valued and as precious members of this one great family that we call Australia.

**A transcript of the apology by *Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull* to the Forgotten Australians and former child migrants on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009 at Parliament House, Canberra.**

Thank you very much Mr Speaker and Prime Minister thank you for your speech. The motion has the unqualified support of the Opposition.

Now the Prime Minister recognised my fellow Members of Parliament and diplomats and other members of the great and the good but I just want to say today I'm talking to all of us, to all of you, the good, to whom so much wrong was done.

Today is your day. You are here today in your hundreds, representing hundreds of thousands of survivors of childhoods stolen and abused.

You were abandoned and betrayed by governments, churches and charities.

Thousands of children, some of you taken from the other end of the world, were placed in institutions – with many names; orphanages, farms, training schools, gaols – called "homes" although most were as far from "home" as one could ever imagine.

Those of you who were child migrants were part of a deliberate and calculating policy of many governments to bring children from Britain and Malta to populate the Empire with "good white stock."

Arthur Calwell, the Australian Immigration Minister at the end of the Second World War, planned to bring 50,000 orphans to Australia – mercifully his target was never reached.

Churches and charities competed to gather up orphans of their own denomination.

And as government ministers and bishops and chairmen of charity

committees congratulated themselves on their generosity and kindness, too many of you were left in the care of people who abused you, who beat you, who raped you, who neglected you cruelly.

And as we have seen from your own testimony, too often if you dared to complain, you would just be beaten again.

Some of you were lied to, told you had no family. That your mother was dead when she lived. That you had no brothers and sisters when you did.

Already stripped of your own sense of identity, your own childhood, many of you were just given a number.

What a cruel and bitter absurdity it is, that this system of "homes" reinforced and made worse every vulnerability and frailty of its inmates.

Today we acknowledge that, already feeling alone, abandoned, and left without love, many of you were beaten and abused, physically, sexually, mentally – treated like objects not people – leaving you to feel of even less worth.

Today we acknowledge that with broken hearts and breaking spirits you were left in the custody – we can hardly call it "care" – of too many people whose abuse and neglect of you, whose exploitation of you, made a mockery of their claim that you were taken from your own family "for your own good."

Today we acknowledge that your parents who, ground down by poverty, surrendered you into the hands of those who claimed, and your parents believed, to be able to give you a better life, but instead exposed you to horrors no child should ever have to endure.

It is no wonder, so many of you say that when you went into the "home" you felt you were going out of the frying pan into the fire.

Today I want you to know we admire you, we believe you, we love you.

You experienced so many horrors it would be natural to bury their memory, too painful to recall.

But bravely you have climbed down that dark well of bitter memory and brought back into the light the stories of your life – stories that must be told and re-told and never ever forgotten.

And by having the courage to do this, having the courage to stand up and tell your stories, you have done more than paint a picture of an era of neglect, exploitation, cruelty and abuse.

You have, as Joanna Penglase reminds us, also set up a window through which we can see things far off and very close.

Through your story we look straight into our own hearts as well.

At the beginning of the Senate Committee's "Forgotten Children" Report there is a quotation of Nelson Mandela.

"Any nation that does not care for and protect all of its children does not deserve to be called a nation."

And this nation did not care enough for you. It did not protect you as it should. And that is why we are apologising today.

Through your story we see our own failings as a nation – our own failings as people.

Mandela calls on us to care and protect all of our nation's children. Not just our own children, not just children we find agreeable or talented or well behaved – but all of our nation's children.

And just as we ask ourselves whether in different circumstances we too could have spent our childhood in a "home", as you did, so we should ask ourselves whether we too could have neglected you and abused you as others did.

Or could we have been a Minister, a Bishop or a member of a worthy charity committee that presided over these homes, but did not know, or perhaps did not want to know of the neglect and the abuse that you were suffering.

Those homes are long closed and they will never re-open. But when we hear a child scream in pain in the next apartment, or we see a little boy at school with bruises, or a little girl who seems sleepless and withdrawn – do we say: it's none of our business?

Only a few weeks ago I met the chief executive of NAPCAN, the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

NAPCAN is campaigning to raise awareness of, and therefore prevent, child abuse and neglect. We met at the Benevolent Society's Scarba House, at Bondi, in my electorate.

There are a group of dedicated workers there supporting families where children are at risk of neglect, supporting families so that they can stay together.

They are doing their utmost to keep children together with their mothers and their fathers – helping to support some of the 30,000 children who are currently today subject to child protection orders.

It is great work they are doing – but Scarba House has another story to tell.

Fifty two years ago there was no support for single mothers deserted, abused by their husbands and so often abandoned by their husbands and by society, those mothers lost their children.

One of those children was Pippa Corbett – she was eight. She had a little sister and a little brother. She told her story to the Senate Inquiry.

Pippa wrote: "We were put into Scarba House in Wellington Street, Bondi. It was a hellhole. My brother – he was two months old – was put into a separate area away from us. I could only watch him from behind a glass window lying in a cot. He was never held or picked up and I used to yell "give me my brother" constantly and they belted me with a switch..."

But the walls of these places have neither ears nor mouths. Only people can speak, and you have done so, courageously and especially through the work of your advocacy associations, including: the Care Leavers Australia Network; the International Association of Former Child Migrant and Their Families; the Alliance for Forgotten Australians – without your tenacity and persistence there would have been no Senate Inquiry and certainly no apology today – and can I add to the Prime Minister's thanks to those members of the Senate Inquiry, but in particular to you Senator Murray.

Last week, I visited the museum at CLAN's office in Sydney and I saw there a little suitcase, it belonged to a boy called Peter Hicks.

The inside lid of the suitcase was plastered with the marks of old sticky tape Peter had used to attach, very carefully, the lists of the contents of his suitcase – a pair of socks, a pair of underpants, a pair of shorts, a shirt – this was all his worldly possessions.

Peter had been given the suitcase when he was four years old. Each year he would pack his belongings excitedly at the Melbourne City Mission in Brunswick and later the Gordon Home for Boys, and he would be escorted outside the gates of the home, where he would make the trip to High Street, Thornbury, to spend four or five weeks over Christmas with his "holiday parents", Mr and Mrs Wright.

This was the one special opportunity to sample, if only briefly, the family life he imagined other kids might enjoy.

The suitcase, this little battered suitcase, was Peter's one passport to a life beyond the grim orphanage in which he had found himself at only 14 months of age.

Fortunately for Peter, his holiday parents, Mr and Mrs Wright, were the same parents every summer. Even attending Peter's marriage to Carol, standing in the place of parents Peter would never really know.

Like so many care leavers and child migrants, there is much about his childhood Peter cannot forget or forgive from his time at the Gordon Boys Home: the violent assaults; the degrading abuses; the loss of innocence – where marginalised children like Peter were brutalised, and used as child labour, under the guise of safeguarding their faith, or protecting them from "moral danger".

Peter writes "you taught me nothing about love as a child only cruelty and low self esteem".

In these institutions, children were not allowed to talk during meal times, or allowed to sustain each other through friendship, but especially they were denied the friendship of kinship.

Peter, bearing the tragedy of not knowing his parents, was then split apart from his own brothers – a story that is as you know as cruel as it was common.

But, perhaps most of all, the greatest tragedy was never really knowing his mother. A tragedy faced by so many of you the former child migrants and children who grew up in these homes.

With no belongings, nowhere to sleep, and completely cut off from his family,

Peter tried to find the one person whose love and affection all children desire – that of their mother.

He wrote away, seeking answers, but he received an abrupt and business like response from the Police saying 'they didn't do that sort of thing'.

At the age of 40, he received a call out of the blue. A woman was in hospital, and had requested he come. He wasn't told why. Peter's mother was on her deathbed. Six weeks later, she died of cancer. For only six weeks out of his 56 years, Peter got to know his mum. Peter is with us here today.

Stories like Peter's are a savage indictment on our society. But we must tell them.

And here in Australia's Parliament House, we stand before you, the Forgotten but now Remembered Australians and the former child migrants to say on behalf of all Australians that we as a nation are sorry.

I hope, as do we all, that this apology helps restore dignity and respect. We are apologising for failing to believe you, for failing to protect you.

To those children whose brutal experiences in out of home care has irreparably damaged you – we apologise, and we are sorry.

To the former child migrants, who came to Australia from a home far away, lead to believe this land would be a new beginning, when only to find it was not a beginning, but an end, an end of innocence – we apologise and we are sorry.

To the mothers who lost the maternal right to love and care for their child – we apologise, and we are sorry.

To those who died hearts broken from a life of pain and hurt all too often in

despair taking their own life – we apologise, and we are sorry.

To the families whose lives have been impacted by the failure to properly protect and care for your parents, grandparents, husbands and wives, when they were just little children – we apologise and we are sorry.

We are sorry because none of us can give back what was taken. We are sorry because not one of us here today has the power to undo the damage done. We are sorry because we cannot restore to you the one thing to which all children should be entitled as a basic right – a safe and beloved childhood. We are sorry because, across the generations, the system failed you; the nation failed you, by looking the other way.

As custodians of your interests, this Parliament, and other parliaments around the country and indeed across the world, allowed some of the youngest and most vulnerable of our citizens to be exposed to dangers and hardships to which no child should ever be exposed.

Through our failure to be more vigilant, to be more caring, we burdened young lives with fear and anguish – and in the worst cases, with the misery and the torment of physical, sexual and mental abuse.

Now we recognise the different experiences of each and every single child growing up in institutionalised care. Each of you has a story to tell of your own personal experiences and each story has enormous value and I welcome the initiatives the Prime Minister has announced today, all of them, but let me particularly note the support he has given to you to tell your story so that just as you will no longer be forgotten, you will be remembered and your stories will be remembered and never forgotten.

We know you tried to run away, all those years ago, and we apologise for never stopping to ask the question – why?

Thank you, all of you who have been able to share your memories, however

painful to ensure this part of our nation's story is told and remembered. We acknowledge, we admire your courage and your honesty. We know that for many of you this was the first time these awful events had been discussed with your own families and your own children. Know this: we believe you.

You were failed by the system of care. For far too long, your stories were not believed, when they should have been and for that too, we apologise and we are sorry.

They are the stories we need to tell today, to help others to understand that journey because each and every one of you here today are survivors.

We recognise those 'survivors' who have had happy adult lives, have raised their own families, and have succeeded in overcoming their painful pasts.

Yet as much as we admire the resilience and the bravery of those who have managed so well, to put it behind them, we must also be unstinting in our profound sympathy, compassion, respect and understanding for those for whom the scars inflicted by years of trauma may never heal.

For those who have suffered decades of grief, haunted by your childhood – emotionally paralysed and unable to move forward, today I hope you can take the first step forward because you are not to blame. It was governments, churches and charities that failed you – and for this, we are truly sorry.

I hope that this apology, too late in coming, helps you to find peace.

And more than that, let us resolve that here today we will be forever vigilant in the protection of our nation's children – our children, your children, all of Australia's children.

Thank you very much.