



VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

National Apology for Forced Adoptions: 10th Anniversary

[Speaker – Ms Kate Thwaites, Member for Jagajaga, Victoria]

My question is to the Prime Minister. Today marks the 10th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. Why was the apology necessary and why is it still important 10 years later?

[Speaker – Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister of Australia]

Ten years ago today, on behalf of the government and the people of Australia, Prime Minister Julia Gillard said sorry to all those affected by forced adoptions. Tonight, there will be a commemorative dinner at the National Portrait Gallery for those affected by these experiences. And tomorrow the Minister for Social Services will deliver a statement in the chamber.

The national apology offered on 21 March 2013 was an honest, humble and long overdue acknowledgement of the harm and loss and grief and trauma inflicted on mothers separated from their children and on children separated from their mothers. It hailed, as we do today, those affected who fought so hard for the justice they were due and it recognised, as we do today, those who did not live to see the truth told.

Prime Minister Gillard's speech also dealt unflinchingly and unsparingly with what drove and allowed that separation. In Julia's words 'holding the mirror to ourselves' reflecting on the imagined moral superiority which inflicted its judgement and its cruelty on vulnerable people. Today, again, we remember their suffering and loss, and we reflect on a culture that enabled and facilitated the practice of denying mothers even a single moment with the baby that they had brought into the world.

As Prime Minister Gillard said: ... they did not see their baby's face. They couldn't sooth his— or her— first cries. Never felt her warmth or smelt her skin. They could not give their own baby a name.

And this is not ancient history, not some distant tale from the vanished past. The Australians affected are with us still, from two generations. Mothers who, through the years, paused in quiet moments to think of a child who would be taking her first steps, or waving at the gate for his first day of school or

beaming proudly on graduation day. And children who were left uncertain as to how their path on life's journey began.

Today, a decade on, we pay tribute to all those who, in the face of decades of callous indifference, demanded that the people of Australia apologise for the harm that was done in their name. We remember those whose lives were cut short, who did not live to witness that moment of healing. We salute the leadership of Julia Gillard and the advocacy of Jenny Macklin and those such as Steve Irons who played such an important role in those events of 10 years ago.

And we vow to heed the lessons of this chapter in our nation's history, to reach for empathy, humility and humanity before we leap to judgement. And we remember that strength in leadership is not defined simply by the exercise of power. Strength is about accountability and telling the truth, even when that truth isn't comfortable or is hard to bear. Long may Australia remember this anniversary, which will be commemorated this evening with a dinner. And then we in the parliament tomorrow will commemorate it across both sides of this chamber. But long may we honour those who, even though it was so difficult for them, gave us one of the finest moments in this parliament's history.

[Speaker – Hon Peter Dutton MP, Leader of the Opposition]

I want to associate the coalition with the fine words of the Prime Minister. It was a proud day for this parliament that we were able to stop, to pause, to apologise, to recognise and to reflect on the history and on the impact it has had on generations of Australians, many of whom will still suffer today with those scars. The impacts on their own relationships and their own children and the psychological impacts just can't be underestimated. The Prime Minister has pointed out the work of many people in this parliament, including Prime Minister Gillard as well as Minister Macklin and Steve Irons. Scott Morrison, later to be Prime Minister, and many others were involved in making sure that the parliament dealt with this in a respectful way. There are many who are still involved in that fight and who are still seeking to make a connection. It is a torture for them ongoing. We really respect those people, and we'll have more to say on the topic in the parliament tomorrow.