**National Sorry Day 26 May 2009**

**JOINT STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF**

**National Native Title Council (NNTC)**

**Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA)**

**Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre**

**New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)**

**Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)**

**National Indigenous Higher Education Network (NIHEN)**

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Legal and Advocacy Service Aboriginal Corporation (ATSIWLAS)
Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM)**

**Bullana, The Poche Centre for Indigenous Health**

**National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia (NIYMA)**

**Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia Inc**

**National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)**

**Indigenous Peoples Organisation Network Youth Delegation**

Thank you Madam Chair

Distinguished Guests and International Representatives

I acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. I pay tribute to all international custodians of their traditional lands, their Elders and descendants.

Today marks the 12th National Sorry Day since the release of the *Bringing Them Home Report* of 1997 by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, (NSW, 1997) of the *National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families* (HREOC 1995-1997), now commonly referred to as the ‘Stolen Generations’.

In the era of ‘protection’, the Australian government wanted to eradicate Indigenous people: put them on missions and reserves, isolate them from society with age restrictions (removing children from as young as 4) and caste restrictions and assimilation rules(1)**,** in the hope that Indigenous people would *‘breed out and die out’* – under the guise of ‘*it’s for their betterment’*.

The policies and rules - of ordinances of 1910-1912 - were modified to suit the application throughout the decades until approximately 1970 and varied by state and territory governments. In reality, the practice of removal occurred since colonisation, with black wars and massacres right up until 1940. This was reported in the *Bringing Them Home Report* as genocide.

In short, coloured or mixed race Indigenous children who were to be taken from their families, communities and lands and trained in institutions, forbidden to practice their traditional customs and language; so they could eventually ‘*take up their place in Australian society*’

These policies and practices contravened the human rights of all Indigenous Australians; and in violation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* endorsed by the UN in 1948. Yet, the report covered removal until 1972. This is evidence that the human rights of Indigenous Australians were not - counted nor visible nor in the psyche - when Australia signed off on that Declaration. Aboriginal people were socially, politically, geographically and economically excluded from Australian society.

National, State and Territory governments lobbied for the implementation of the recommendations of that report. Eventually all state and territory governments - between 1998 and 2003 said “sorry”. Public apologies were also recorded in thousands of Sorry Day Books across Australia. Over the last 12 years National Sorry Day events have been held in every state and territory.

I would also like to commend the Australian Government who on February 13 last year gave a genuine and honest *Motion of Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples,* which was passed by the Australian Parliament. This apology confirms without doubt, that the separation and removal of ‘full blood’ Indigenous to missions and reserves, and removal and separation of ‘half caste’ Indigenous children to institutions were practice and policy.

The inquiry captured 535 individual stories, and 777 submissions, and we know there are many more. It was a belief by Stolen Generations and other Australians that the inquiry would bring justice.

The *Bringing Them Home Report* featured 54 recommendations some with parts totalling 146 part recommendations. Approximately half the recommendations appear to have been implemented. National Sorry Day commemoration is recommendation 7a.

For approximately the past 10 years the Australian Government has funded *Link Up* organisations to find and reconnect with family. The Australian Government has established an Indigenous Steering Committee to implement a much needed “Healing Foundation” to address the family and community traumatisation as a consequence of Australian government practice and policy.

Finally, I dedicate this as a legacy, to all those who were part of the Stolen Generations and have advocated and lobbied for the rights of Stolen Generations at state and national levels in Australia. For our grandmothers and great grandmothers, who are Stolen Generations; for our aunts, uncles, and cousins for many of them too were Stolen.

In closing, I know time is precious, and so too is the value of human life. Let us observe a minutes silence to reflect on the millions of people who will never make it back home, who have been lost, stolen, enslaved, persecuted, seeking refuge, and victims of genocide and disempowerment across our globe. [1 minutes silence]

Thank You.