

Hon. Prime Minister Mr. Kevin Rudd,
cc Members of Parliament, Shadow Ministers and Senators

20/10/2008

Dear Mr. Rudd,

The attached letter is written on behalf of the Apology Alliance. It is an umbrella group that consists of many mothers and other family members separated by illegal and unethical practices in adoption and the post adoption resource centres that support them. This particular letter is also supported by the Intercountry Adoption Network (ICAN): a support group for intercountry adoptees.

We applaud your apology to the members of the Indigenous stolen generation on behalf of the Nation, and think it was a courageous gesture, long overdue. The women and families who I represent would probably, more than most, empathise with the heart breaking loss of a family member/s. The apology though, opened wounds for many natural parents who also had their children forcibly taken because they, usually minors, gave birth outside of marriage. I received many calls and emails at the time from mothers asking: "What about me, I had my child stolen, when is my child going to know the truth?"

In New South Wales, after 1969, with the repeal of the *NSW Aborigine Protection Board Act* by the introduction of the *Aborigines Act*, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous mothers were subject to the same State welfare laws. Briefly, Indigenous and non-Indigenous mothers in this State after 1969 had their children forcibly taken by the same social workers and medical staff from the same institutions under the same laws. I would presume that it would have been similar in other States.

To highlight the complexities of the above I will summarise the case of a non-Indigenous friend of mine who gave birth to an Indigenous son, stolen from her. She and her partner went on to have three further children whom they raised. Her son, partner and her other children have been apologised too, she has not.

I have just launched a book of mothers' stories¹[1] that highlights some of the illegal and unethical activities that were entrenched in past adoption practice. To list just a few of the abuses: Mothers were systematically drugged; forbidden to see, touch or nurture their newborns and prohibited from leaving the hospital until they signed adoption consents. Justice Richard Chisholm giving evidence at the NSW Inquiry stated that this was akin to false imprisonment and the removal of our children in the ways described under oath, akin to kidnap.

This issue is not one that can be designated to the past. We live, today, with psychological disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, pathological grief, depression and anxiety disorders. Our children suffer, amongst other things, from deep feelings of abandonment, and many other psychological problems, because of the sense of rejection they feel at being deprived of their mothers. Many women, now grandmothers, are denied access to their grandchildren by their now adult children,

who are enraged believing their mothers willingly gave them away without a backward glance.

Only a few days ago I received a call from a very distressed woman who gave birth to her son in Sydney in 1967. He was born with a medical problem and the staff told her that unless she signed the adoption papers he would not receive the medical treatment he needed to survive. This 16 year old, though young and defenceless, knew her way around the medical system. She refused to sign and demanded her son be given the appropriate medical treatment so that she could then take him home. Finally they told her, he had died because she would not sign the papers. The woman never went on to marry nor have further children because she blamed herself for her son's death. Three months ago her supposedly dead son contacted her. He is a 41 year old man full of rage. Because he had a medical defect he was not adopted immediately. He believed his mother had abandoned him because of it. He languished in an institution for several years before being adopted by a woman who he said abused him. The mother, as you can imagine, is devastated. I am not a counsellor I am a researcher. I am aware this case is not an isolated one. The woman rang, however, because she did not know where else to go. There is such a scarcity of mental health professionals adequately trained to deal with this level of trauma. Also because there has been such meagre government support for, or acknowledgment of, the level of distress caused by past practices many women give up trying to get help. Additionally many women like the mother who rang, are on pensions and find it difficult to afford ongoing mental health treatment.

At the NSW Upper House Inquiry (1998-2000) over 300 women gave written and oral testimony of their systematic abuse in public hospitals across NSW. The abuse was substantiated under oath by a psychiatrist, social workers, adoption professionals, medical staff and the former head of the NSW Law Reform Commission and Family Court Judge, Richard Chisholm. A similar phenomenon occurred in an Inquiry held in Tasmania. Women who alleged similar practices occurred in Victoria were promised an Inquiry by the Labor government who then reneged on its promise. Anna Bligh, before taking office in Queensland promised that she would implement the recommendations that came out of the NSW Inquiry for women similarly impacted in her State. The Queensland government has, so far, not honoured its promise.

We as a group have been marginalised and stigmatised for decades. We feel that it is time that the government publicly acknowledge what it has so far done only in official documents and privately: there is a non-Indigenous stolen generation.

We need a National Inquiry into this barbaric chapter of Australian history. Our children need to know that they were wanted and that we did not willingly give them away: they were stolen. We, like the members of the Indigenous stolen generations, need to be apologised to so that we can move on from our loss.

Attached is a letter I am sending to the Federal Attorney and other politicians around the country. It highlights the parallels between intercountry adoption and domestic adoptions as practiced in this country during most of the 20th century. It seems Australia has not yet learnt the lessons of its recent history. This is not surprising since the majority of the Australian community is unaware of the level of abuse

perpetrated on young unwed mothers in the effort to obtain our newborn babies for the adoption market.

I want it put on the record that the false imprisonment and kidnap of the babies of young Australian citizens, many of them minors, was not only criminal but a crime against humanity and nothing less than torture.

I look forward to your response and the opportunity to meet with you personally to discuss the very serious matters I raise in this letter.

Kind regards

Christine A. Cole
Convenor
Apology Alliance Australia