

Protection of Aboriginal Children

Text of a letter sent to Hon. John Howard, Hon. Mal Brough, Hon. Kevin Rudd, 28 June 2007

The NSW Council of Churches welcomes the initiatives announced by the Federal Government in response to the Report of the Wild-Anderson Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse released on 15 June. Council also welcomes the bipartisan approach to the national emergency by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The findings of this and previous reports confirm that cycles of violence and abuse occur in many Australian indigenous communities. These practices are shocking and abhorrent, and must not be permitted to continue. In particular, child abuse and child neglect are unacceptable in any community. It is apparent that in many cases these practices are fuelled by alcohol and drug abuse, petrol sniffing and access to pornography.

In welcoming the new federal initiatives, the NSW Council of Churches wishes to express the view that:

- (a) The violence and abuse documented in the Wild-Anderson Inquiry Report is not only socially unacceptable but should be named as morally evil;
- (b) Violence and abuse, including child sexual abuse, may occur in all communities in Australia;
- (c) The problem is a national problem and not confined to the Northern Territory;
- (d) Non-indigenous as well as indigenous persons are responsible for some of the violence and abuse documented in the Wild-Anderson Inquiry Report;
- (e) Urgent and measured action is required to address the abuse and neglect of children and to assist those directly affected;
- (f) Solutions need to be rolled out in careful consultation with local communities and community leaders;
- (g) Legislative and punitive measures alone cannot be expected to deliver morality in accordance with acceptable community standards;
- (h) Radical changes to education quality and provision (including child care) for indigenous communities should be considered as the foundation for permanent positive change;
- (i) In addition to education, significant progress in basic health, housing and employment opportunities is required, especially in remote communities;
- (j) The spiritual resources and pastoral care and counselling expertise of the Christian churches should be considered as part of the short- and long-term solution.

We offer our support to indigenous communities and the Government in:

- (a) Developing programs to strengthen families and communities to confront the problems they face;
- (b) Consulting adequately with providers of community services, health and education;
- (c) Developing a long term plan to address and resolve the causes of child abuse and neglect including substance abuse, access to pornography, poor housing and education, unemployment, and welfare dependence.