



Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre

24 Roslyn St, Elizabeth Bay, (PO Box 522, Kings Cross, NSW 1340) Australia
Phone +61 (0)2 9356 3888 ; Fax +61 (0)2 9356 3021 ; Web-site <http://www.uniya.org>

OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 98 AUSTRALIAN RECONCILIATION CONVENTION

Two Addresses by Frank Brennan SJ,
Convention Rapporteur
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Australian Reconciliation Convention Report on Day One 27 May 1997

Good Morning. Having been introduced as Rapporteur Clouseau, I feel I should adopt the Peter Sellers Inspector Clouseau accent and ask, "Would you please turn off your mobile phones?"

Might I start by acknowledging the Kulin nation on whose traditional land we are privileged to be, the Kulin people who have welcomed us so graciously. Might I just stop there with an observation that even with protocols of introduction, we know that, in terms of reconciliation, there is still a political edge to it, isn't there? There are still questions as to how comfortable we are in making these sorts of acknowledgments. I think that is alright. This country is going to be a little ill at ease with all of these questions for some time to come.

As we are gathered, just think back to yesterday morning as people were gathering there in the foyer. There was a very strong energy and a great air of expectation. People we have known all across the country - we momentarily forget names, because we cannot quite place them in these flash surroundings - but we come from remote parts of Australia and poorer parts of Australia. Here we are with this great energy and this sense of expectation coming from across many sectors. And I think we come with an air of celebration, particularly today, the thirtieth anniversary, of which we will hear more. Just as I was coming down in the lift, we stopped at the eighth floor and Lois O'Donoghue got on board. With me were some American tourists who had just had a big win over at Jeffrey's place last night. I had the great pleasure of introducing them to Lois as one of the great Australians. I was able to explain something of the events of thirty years ago to these foreign guests. They were genuinely delighted, and I thought, "Wouldn't it be good if ordinary middle class Australians coming back from the casino could be genuinely delighted to meet the truly great Australians who contributed to that event?"

As we think back on yesterday, let us also call to mind that candle, and all that Patrick Dodson said to us about it. It calls to mind the times of darkness there have been, the shadows that are still there, but also the light and the hope that is there for the future. And the vision was given us by many people. Let's call to mind especially the youth. Tammy Williams put to us: "What could be worse than being a blind nation? One with sight but no vision." We need to own the past, but, as she reminded us, quoting Oodgeroo, "Let us not be bitter - that is an empty thing, a maggot in the mind". Or David Matthews, with his background at the Redfern Primary School, and his gentle admonition to all of us as elders, 'We are watching you with interest.' It was interesting to note the youth group who reported back yesterday who noted that the Convention was too expensive for most youth and that they probably need their own representative on the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

The difficult issues of yesterday, I think maybe were best highlighted, we might even say enfolded, in a few individuals who appeared before us, because yesterday was a real experience of living inside reconciliation. No one could pretend that there was agreement or consensus. But that does not mean that we walk away. It means that our resolve and our vision have to grow more precise. Let us call to mind people like Patrick Dodson, Dr Boraine, and Archbishop Tutu. People who, through the years of suffering and wrestling with the questions, have to them that peace and that simplicity of vision of reconciliation.

For me, the three things that emerged most strongly yesterday were with the usual themes of past, present and future. Past: the whole question about apology, guilt and shame - owning out history. Present: our values as Australians. Looking at ourselves as a people's movement and looking for laws and policies which can renew the nation. Appreciating what we have in common. And looking to the future: wrestling with the vexed questions. Are we talking about one law or two laws? Co-existence and special rights. How do we accept difference? Let me offer a few observations on each of those three.

1. The Past: Apology, Owning Our History.

As Dr Boraine put before us, what we need is a good dose of truth-telling which transcends the lie, the half-truth, the cover-up, the need for absolute, sacred silence; for a deep heart-felt apology. Many of us came with an air of expectation, waiting to hear from the Prime Minister. In the lead-up, we thought that there would be little or no apology. But it was there, and let us recall, as best we can, the precise words that were used:

Personally, I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous people. Equally, I am sorry for the hurt and trauma many here today may continue to feel, as a consequence of these practices.

Let us acknowledge that this is difficult terrain, for any of us, whether or not we are Prime Minister. This balance between the individual apology and the apology on behalf of the nation. And to be fair to him, and not unfair to Mr Beazley, let us bear in mind that Mr Beazley did not offer a personal apology, rather indicating that, in his view, it was a matter for the Parliament or more for the Government. And so here, we have real work to do with all of the major political parties in this country. And we have got to do it leading by example, not by preaching to them about things like guilt and shame and things of the past. I have a

suggestion for us tomorrow (I think to do it today would be too facile). We need time to think about it. Maybe tomorrow we should engage in some small ritual of our own, expressing personal apologies. Then, maybe, as a convention, we could in some way express a collective apology as the convention.

If we look at what Mr Hugh Mackay put before us, he said that we ought to be ashamed of ourselves, but, in the end, he thought that the road to reconciliation was simple. And to highlight how it is not to take political points to focus on differences in these things, no one would doubt his integrity in what he said. Nor would anyone doubt the integrity of what Lady Deane put before us, but she stated that the road to reconciliation is a very difficult one. And so, there are very different perspectives, all of which are valid, in this sort of exercise.

2. The Present: One Land, Different Worlds

Let's say a word about the present. The Prime Minister spoke of what he saw as the grounds for optimism. Those great Australian characteristics: decency, tolerance, generosity, common sense and a fair go for all Australians. Hugh Mackay, on the other hand, reminded us very poignantly, that these things of mateship, egalitarianism and a fair go for all are not quite what they seem to be. There are very different views of the world out there, and it is not just on the issue of indigenous rights or on the place of our indigenous people. As the Prime Minister told us in the context of his apology, it was not to be a matter of national guilt and shame. But then he put his own unique view as to where this is going, that is that we cannot share a common destiny together as Australians if different groups in our society have different standards of conduct and different systems of accountability; that the law cannot become fractured and apply different rules to different sections of society. Twenty years ago, that was the received wisdom. It is still the received wisdom among many Australians. But there are now many other Australians who can accommodate in their minds, the notion of two world views, of two laws, of different perspectives. And if you are in any doubt about the integrity and authenticity of that, just call to mind the presentation by Manduwuy Yunupingu yesterday. One of the recommendations by the local government group yesterday was that there should be welcome signs at the entrance to each town with not only a description of the population figures but also signs recognising the indigenous regions and places. It might be some way to start in a practical way the notification of these different worlds in which we live.

3. The Future: Sharing the Country

And, finally, a word about the future. What is before us today is the task of coming to terms with accepting difference and accommodating that difference. I think we saw that beautifully with the Rhythm of the Nation. Now, it may be because I am a Brennan and my mother an O'Hara, but I was very moved by the Irish dancers yesterday! I have to say that I was confirmed in this view over the break immediately thereafter, because I ran into a few O'Shanes and Lois O'Donoghue; they agreed full heartedly. But, seeing all of these different cultures coming together and then being unified by the indigenous dance which wove through those different dances and musics and brought them together - brought them together as our dance, our music, our song. They were not just Irish dancers - they were Australian dancers. And it was the Aboriginal dancer who gave them that authenticity and that reality.

We come to wrestle with this question about how do we recognise these differences, how do we accommodate them, and how do we move beyond it being an expression of words. We know there is much work to be done, and that will be done in the plenaries and also in the seminars. Last night, by way of example, the City of Melbourne presented its commitment to indigenous Australians. That commitment contains a commitment to negotiate with the indigenous people in the City of Melbourne, as they work towards future developments of this city. That, surely, is a model of a way to go. So, as we prepare to look today, moving beyond simply being a people's movement, to those who propose structures for national reconciliation, might I recall the words of Mr Wenten Rubuntja who is here with us, who in 1988, when there was talk first of a treaty or an instrument of reconciliation, said:

Today there are lots of people living in this country, people who have come from all over the world. We don't call them foreigners. We don't ask, 'Where's your country? Where's your father from?' They have been born here. Their mother's blood is in this country. This is their country too now. So, all of us have to live together. We have to look after each other. We have to share this country. And this means respecting each other's laws and culture. We have to work out a way of sharing this country. But there has to be an understanding of, and respect of our culture and law

So let's go forward today with that profound respect for each other, for our cultures and for our laws.

Australian Reconciliation Convention
Closing Address
28 May 1997

A few months ago I was at a meeting with Mick and Pat Dodson, and we were discussing this forthcoming convention. At the end of it Mick said to Pat, "Well after three days, where does that get us?" And Pat said, "Resurrection mate." Mick was a little exasperated and said, "Brother, that's when all the trouble started." Pat retorted, "No brother, it was forty days later when he left them." All of us, whatever our religion or none, can take up something of that Christian metaphor of resurrection: we're talking about new life; we're talking about new energy, new commitment and new presence. And it's a new life against the odds; it's a new energy even through death; it's a commitment even through suffering; and it's a presence through thick and thin. That is what we celebrate at the end of these three days.

Prompted by Noel Pearson, I have taken as the markers for this final reflection the eight signposts which Sir William Deane gave us in his Lingiari lecture. As an aside, might I say that, for those of us with a republican sentiment, the quality of leadership shown at this convention by present and past Vice-Regal representatives shows just how much work we have to do. To each of them we are very grateful.

1. The express acknowledgement of the past "injustice and oppression" suffered by the people.

Sir William Deane said that the first signpost was the express acknowledgment of the past injustice and oppression suffered by the people. As we indicated yesterday we will take the opportunity, not waiting for government, not chastising government, but taking the responsibility ourselves. So this morning, just for a minute or two, those of us who are not indigenous Australians, let's turn to those indigenous people around us, to those who want to offer their hands. To them, let us offer a personal apology. If for nothing else, let us apologise that even when we act with the best of intentions we still so often get it wrong. Let's apologise.

[interjection from the floor by Mrs Shirley Lomas]

Shirley might I just say that I am sorry about your son and I'm sorry that there's absolutely nothing that I am able to do to help him.

As Dame Roma Mitchell indicated to us this morning, there is a need for more than just personal apology. We need to make a collective apology. And we saw this indicated and lived out last night at the dinner for the presentation of the Reconciliation Awards. It is not just a matter of words. With the award for the Aboriginal Training and Liaison Unit at Hammersley Iron, we heard from Jill Churnside who spoke of "the ups and downs of my people - tremendous satisfaction both learning and trying to do business together." It wasn't always that way for the indigenous people and the mining company in that area. Consider also the shortlisted award for the Daiwui Gidja Culture Group Aboriginal Corporation of the Warmun Community close to the Argyle diamond mine. Let's call to mind the apology that was issued by CRA last year when CRA said, "For most of the time of iron ore mining and infrastructure development in the Pilbara the local Aboriginal people were ignored. There is a large scar on the site of the barramundi dreaming at Argyle - there is a similar scar on the spirit of the women of the area." In the light of CRA's present position on Aboriginal relations which its Vice President said was a position that would endure, he told Aboriginal Australia, "I feel it is appropriate to express regret to Aboriginal people in general and the communities of Cape York, the Pilbara and the Eastern Kimberley region in particular." Out of that sort of apology comes a real commitment not only in words but action resulting in last night's celebration when we saw together members of the same mining corporation and the local Aboriginal community with integrity and strength on the same stage receiving the same award.

When we conclude today we'll move that one step further with our collective apology. The words will appear on the screen ahead of time so that those of you who feel free to join in that expression may do so. We all know that no formula of words is perfect, but we've got to make a start; we've got to try. We need to tnJSt.

2. The mutual recognition of a need for some redress.

The second signpost which Sir William gave was the mutual recognition of a need for some redress. Now, we heard a strong speech from the Prime Minister about how this cannot be just a matter of symbolic gestures, and overblown promises. It is not just a matter of national guilt and shame, but rather as Dr Boraine reminded us, there has to be a true commitment to practical change which impacts on the situation of disadvantage of indigenous Australians. But as Dr Boraine also reminded us, we have to make the move to be a democratic culture

and also a human rights culture, restoring the moral order, nurturing the soul of the nation, getting in touch with the spirit of the nation, the spirit of the people. This ARC (the Australian Reconciliation Convention) of which he spoke, the ark which can take us across these high seas of the trauma of the moment to a better life, is now entrusted to us for the well being of the nation.

3. Common rejection of any policy of complete assimilation and common acceptance of the approach that Aborigines have the right to "effective choice about the degree to which and the pace at which" they are assimilated with, or integrated in, ordinary Australian society, and that the primary role of government should be to assist the Aboriginal peoples "to achieve their goals by their own efforts".

The third signpost which was given us by Sir William Deane was the common rejection of any policy of complete assimilation, and common acceptance of the approach that Aborigines have the right to "effective choice about the degree to which and the pace at which" they are assimilated with, or integrated in, ordinary Australian society, and that the primary role of government should be to assist the Aboriginal peoples "to achieve their goals by their own efforts". Now, about that we would have to say there is not presently agreement in this nation; about that, there is going to be sustained debate in the years ahead. We heard the Prime Minister's particular, perhaps nowadays hopefully peculiar, vision of this, speaking of a unilateral standard of conduct; how we cannot have different systems of accountability; we cannot become fractured and apply different rules to different sections of society. On the other hand, as Pat Dodson pointed out to us, "We need to recognise that the truth behind the Stolen Generations was to colonise our mind and spirituality - to dispossess us from our cultures and societies. This is not only a matter of an apology but an acceptance of our right to be indigenous Australians." It is that right to be indigenous Australians which is highly questioned and legitimately questioned in the Australian nation at this time. As we have heard at this Convention, indigenous Australia knows that it must provide some answer for all of us as to what that right is about. As Noel Pearson put it this morning, "Moving beyond the notion of assimilated citizenship to that idea of self-determination." I made reference yesterday to the warming of my heart by the Irish dancers, a feeling shared by the O'Shanes and Lois O'Donoghue. To take that image one step further, it was once put to me "If you're going to have special rights for the Aborigines in Australia, why not special rights for the Irish in Australia?" To which I say "I don't think that's the relevant comparison. The relevant comparison is with the rights of the Irish in Ireland." Now I as an Australian of Irish heritage take some comfort in the thought that there is somewhere on earth where the Irish can be as Irish as they like, and it doesn't matter how well or how badly they do it, it's the just Irish way of doing things.

Hearing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers at this convention, we are in no doubt that indigenous Australians are practical and realistic people. It is known that of course the indigenous population of this country will remain only about two percent. A minority, but a minority entitled to a special place - a special place in the life of this nation, a special place in this land and we non-indigenous Australians owe them that much. In this search for the limits of the right of self-determination, we have been ably assisted by our international speakers. James Anaya, the special counsel from the Indian Law Resource Centre, put before us this proposition: "Indigenous peoples have the right to control their own destinies under conditions of equality. This does not mean that Indigenous peoples have a freestanding right

to form their own states or to any one particular form of political arrangement. Rather self determination means that indigenous peoples, along with all other peoples, are entitled to participate equally in the constitution and development of the governing institutional order in which they live and, further, to live with a governing order in which they may live and develop freely on a continuous basis." Now perhaps more trenchantly it has been put by Geoff Clark, ATSIC Commissioner, who put before us: "Self determination should not be defined to exclude the possibility of secession, because limiting rights perpetrates the existence of two classes of peoples."

Obviously, within the intellectual indigenous leadership, not only of this country but of the world, there is a sustained discussion that is to be had. We have to be tolerant and await the resolution of that discussion. We were honoured to hear from Grand Chief Ted Moses from the Grand Council of the Crees who pointed out that indeed he and his people are passionate about the right of self determination, but as they would see it they want to exercise it by remaining part of Canada rather than being ripped aside by the people of Quebec. But what are the terms and conditions in which he sees that as the situation? It is that in Canada the rights of the Aboriginal peoples are explicitly protected by the constitution and there is a treaty making process which continues actively. They continue to believe that reconciliation is possible as they strive for a new level of understanding that can engender the new relationship.

As we look at this vexed issue of self determination, all of us Australians have to acknowledge that this is about a system of law and order which is not just about the will of the elected leaders. We are talking about democracy under the rule of law. Democracy under the rule of law that ensures the special protection of the place of indigenous Australians. We have heard from Marcia Langton that may mean an endorsement of an international declaration. It may mean a bill of rights. It may mean some constitutional recognition of the place of indigenous people. Whatever the mix of answers there must be some commitment of that sort.

4. There is a need for someone who can speak and act with authority on behalf of the Aboriginal people.

The fourth point, as put to us by Sir William Deane: There is a need for someone who can speak and act with authority on behalf of the Aboriginal people. And we have seen that done so eloquently in this convention. Just think yesterday of Lois O'Donoghue chairing those proceedings for the 1967 referendum celebrations. Her wish of happy anniversary. A wish which was bestowed by a leader of her people. Just think of the extraordinary presence of Mililani Trask, the Governor of Ka Lahui Hawaii, and her description of being there in Vienna and calling the Masai onto the floor of the convention centre, the first international meeting between indigenous peoples and nation states. But let us remember that this is not an easy issue and it's a major problem confronting indigenous Australia. As Joe McGuinness pointed out with such integrity in his thirtieth anniversary speech, "There are divisions, there are different perspectives of the urban, the rural and the traditional." But there is a need for that unity and for that strength because, as Joe says, "If something needs fixing get on and fix it."

If I might offer just two anecdotes about indigenous leadership. In this context it is appropriate to take examples of Mick and Pat Dodson. There has been much emotion in this hall about the stolen children inquiry. There were heightened emotions for me and for many in a tin shed at the Halls Creek racetrack when the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission was hearing its evidence in that remote part of Australia. I remember the day that I was there when the proceedings had to be suspended because emotions on all sides were just running so high. It requires true leadership in order that these emotions can be galvanised and turned to the good, not just of the nation, but of the people who have been so desperately hurt through all of this history. In doing it those of us who are not indigenous also require that leadership. If I might tell one small church story from that area. I remember one day speaking to a religious sister whose congregation had first set up the leprosarium in that part of the world. She was very distressed having heard the evidence wondering, "What could any of us do today? What will be said of us in thirty years time?". She met Pat Dodson and he looked at her and said, "Who went to the lepers?" She said she felt healed, she felt strong, she felt that she could go on. That could not have been said to that woman with that result if it were by a non-indigenous person. That sort of exchange is absolutely essential in this nation if we are to deal with the moral complexities which confront us on this issue. That is the tragedy of the political process outside this meeting place in recent days about that report. White fellas on their own will not provide any answer to the moral complexity of questions about compensation or where we go from here. We have to work on it together.

5. The heart of the reconciliation at Wave Hill was a consensus that the Aborigines and "the Whites" would thenceforth go forward as friends and equals.

The fifth signpost given us by the Governor-General is that the heart of the reconciliation of Wave Hill was a consensus that the Aborigines and the whites would thenceforth go forward as friends and equals. Just think back to yesterday morning: that vision of Faith Bandler and Joe McQuinness and speaking of Jesse Street. Just think of all the people who were gathered on that stage, churchgoers and communists, yes some in what Noel Pearson described this morning as their Lutheran torpor, others in what he described as their Uniting Church communistic bent, the black and the white, the Street family, men and women - democrats and free thinkers as Faith described them. Recall that remark that Pearl Gibbs made to Faith Bandler, "You mightn't be one of us, but you won't be free until we are." And didn't those words resonate with every one of us who wants to call ourselves Australian? The example given us by that group of '67 is that they lived the dream. They did not wait for government or just engage in the chastisement of government, they lived and worked equality and, therefore, it came to be. Equality so as to overcome adverse special treatment. We must now live and work reconciliation and it will come to be. Equality so as to have equality of opportunity, including the opportunity of indigenous Australians to live their lives, their cultures, their religions, in the freedom of this special place we call Australia. To do this we endorse the many moves made by the Australians For Reconciliation, and we urge that we redouble our efforts to attract into our ranks many more friends of reconciliation. We need a people's movement.

6. Reconciliation between the nation and the Gurindji was achieved notwithstanding that much remained undone.

The sixth signpost given us by Sir William is that reconciliation between the nation and the Gurindji was achieved notwithstanding that much remained undone. We have to be specific about what is achievable and go for it. As Ray Martin said to us last night, "Here are fifteen examples of what you can do." It is time for us to go forward from this place and to start doing it. In terms of that vision, as Faith Bandler said to us, we want a country that is stable and peaceful. At present, its air is troubled. In this climate of callousness, with a move to dismantle structures of democracy heavily overshadowing us, our task now is to use our voices, our energy, our will and our talent to mobilise the forces of goodwill. We can demolish those forces of destruction under the banner of justice for all.

Now we must admit, as we look back to 1967, with the benefit of hindsight, there was so much that was still undone. There were the issues of land rights and stolen children. Only now do we come to address the questions of *Wik* and the Human Rights Commission report. As Pat Dodson has said to us, "Reconciliation requires commitment to the principles of tolerance, respect for others' views, and negotiation rather than confrontation, speaking honestly to each other, the better to find the common ground and to debate our differences in a mature way."

In this context, might I also say a word about the profound significance of the *Mabo* decision. In doing so, I do not want to quote myself, I do not want to quote any indigenous Australian, I do not even want to quote the "trendy" CRA which is doing so well in the reconciliation awards, following upon its apology. I want to quote one who had not spoken on this issue in this way before, but who did so at this Convention: Mr Campbell Anderson, Chairman of the Minerals Council of Australia said, "I see the division or differences that need to be reconciled as fundamentally the lack of respect for the different values held to be important as between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people." Note the difference here between what he said and what the Prime Minister said. We are here talking about different values, between different groups who live in the Australian nation. He went on, "I remain concerned about the ultimate economic implications of *Mabo* ..." (and that's fair enough for a miner), "...but now, as we approach the fifth anniversary of the decision, I am convinced that it will be remembered as a turning point in changing community perceptions, and in bringing indigenous and non-indigenous people together to work towards reconciliation." This is the Chairman of the Minerals Council of Australia. He completed by saying, "Without the *Mabo* decision, I question whether the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation could have achieved the community interest in the Australian Reconciliation Convention."

And now, as we go forward from *Mabo* to *Wik*, we have to admit that, indeed, there will be misunderstandings and there will be abiding misunderstandings, while much remains undone. But as we try to work our way through those misunderstandings, let's at least pledge ourselves on our side to a transparency in the process, to an honesty of dialogue. The Prime Minister on Monday, it seemed to me, reacted strongly against statements made by Mr Dodson about his interpretation of the 10 point plan. The Prime Minister rejected what he called the suggestion of a massive handout of freehold title at taxpayers' expense. Pat Dodson had said: "The ten-point plan in response to *Wik* is not acceptable. Why not? Because taken as a whole it does not treat coexistence fairly. It takes away the rights of indigenous people which were recognised in the common law of Australia by the highest court in the land, and proposes at the same time to increase the landholding rights of those with pastoral leases, largely at taxpayers' expense." The Prime Minister followed, taking issue with Pat Dodson's

assessment of the ten points. Angrily thumping the podium, he shouted, "I also in the name of truth and in the name of a frank discussion of these issues have to repudiate the claim that my ten point plan involves a massive handout of freehold title at taxpayer expense. That is an absolute myth, it is absolutely contrary to the facts and I absolutely repudiate it." He said, "This is an absolute myth. It is absolutely contrary to the fact, and I absolutely repudiate it." Might I just make these observations. It is not absolutely contrary to the Prime Minister's own earlier statement that the Commonwealth would pay 75 per cent of the compensation payable for compulsory acquisition of native title by the States, for the purpose of pastoralists upgrading their title, provided only that the State charge something (less than 25 per cent) for the betterment factor. Nor is contrary it to Mr Fischer's statement before flying to Longreach with him, saying that the 10 point plan permits 'buckets of extinguishment'. Mr Dodson could be forgiven for being mistaken.

The good news is that yesterday the Senate voted that it will not permit one bucket of extinguishment of common law native title, because, by the narrowest of votes, the Senate voted that the 1967 referendum, if I may quote the resolution, "was passed with the intent that the power conferred on the Commonwealth should only be used for the benefit of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples." So let's drop the talk of buckets of extinguishment. It's not going to happen. The Senate won't let it happen; the High Court won't let it happen; we won't let it happen; and, Mr Howard, when the people of Australia understand what this issue is about, you won't let it happen either.

7. There was consensus about steps which had already or would immediately be taken and steps and policies which would be taken or followed in the future to partly redress the wrongs of the past.

The seventh signpost offered us by the Governor-General is that there was consensus about steps which had already would immediately be taken, and steps and policies which would be taken or followed in the future to partly redress the wrongs of the past. Let's listen to the words of those who, after their appearance at this Convention, should now be accorded the honour of being Australia's first couple of Reconciliation. I refer to Sir William and Lady Deane. In looking at the issue of partial redress, let's adopt the twin Deane test. Lady Deane said, "What indigenous women want for their families and communities is very much the same as what I want for my own family and for those who are close to me." Mainstream Australia, whatever that is, understands that very well. Sir William Deane said, "We will not achieve true reconciliation unless and until we address and resolve (the challenges) at least to the extent that it can be seen, that we are making real progress towards a position where the future prospects of an Aboriginal baby are comparable with those of a non-Aboriginal one."

If we are to achieve this, it is not just about talking together. It is about walking together and working together. As Ruby Roughley from the Flinders Island Reconciliation Milestones, winner of the Community Category last night, put it: "We were two groups of people just sitting down and talking together - part of walking together."

8. Consensus is transformed into a formal ceremony of reconciliation.

That brings us to the final signpost. Consensus is transformed into a formal ceremony of reconciliation. In the light of deliberations and spirit of this convention, we must now add the

need for a national document of reconciliation. Pat Dodson said to us on the first day of this convention:

We need to find a better way of doing things....If we don't want to stumble from crisis to crisis, then we must define some principles and establish a framework and a machinery for how to deal with these issues at all levels

And the Governor-General also gave us a gentle warning. He said:

If those of us who are convinced of the rightness and urgency of that cause, look around and appreciate the depth of our mutual commitment to it and to one another, we will gain the confidence, the strength and the wisdom to speak more quietly, more tolerantly, more constructively, more persuasively and more convincingly to our fellow Australians who are yet to be convinced.

In that spirit, we direct our eyes once again to the candle which Pat Dodson lit on that first day. We recall again the darkness of our shared histories; the dark side of national psyche. But we affirm, in the spirit of reconciliation, that it is always better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

As we now set out on that ARC of which Dr Boraine spoke, we know that we go, not just as the members of a Convention, but as a people's movement, and as a people who are committed to the well being of the nation. Our commitment could be summed up by saying that we do not want this to be any land for Paul Kelly's Little Kings. We are troubled to hear one of our own sing, "I'm so afraid for my country".

If we wrestle with these issues trying to determine an appropriate ceremony or time or place, let us at least ensure that we listen to all the voices. We have already heard that the proposed National Sorry Day is seen by some Australians as inappropriate. Might I simply say, it is no more inappropriate than January 26 being maintained as the national day. One Australian's settlement is another's invasion. As we lead up to 2001, we need to find a national day, and perhaps a number of national days. We have to accommodate and respect those different perspectives. As we do so, we cannot just rely upon our elected representatives.

Those who have not seen all the papers or heard all the radios in the last twenty-four hours might think I am being facetious in my next observation. You will recall yesterday we had that wonderful ceremony where the Governor-General and Faith Bandler revealed to us the plaque with the request that it be hung in our Parliament House. Do you know what our politicians did yesterday? The House of Representatives passed a resolution indicating that they would support the request that the plaque be appropriately housed in the old Parliament House. The Senate, for its part, passed a resolution supporting a request that the plaque be appropriately housed in the new Parliament House. I am sure it is a wonderful plaque. I am sure it is made of strong Australian metal I do not suggest that we physically cut it in two. But perhaps we might imagine it broken in two until the Senate and the House of Representatives get their act together. Meanwhile let us recall the 30th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, with that plaque broken into two, half of it sitting at the will of the House of Representatives in the old Parliament House, and half of it, at the will of the Senate sitting in the new Parliament House. We say to our elected leaders: "You may have been elected,

but we, the Australian People, would like to be able to read the whole of that plaque, and we would like to see it at in the new Parliament House."

Thinking of the old and the new Parliament Houses, we might also call to mind the tent embassy. We heard suggestions from the convention that there should be some national place of memory. Maybe that place could be near the tent embassy; near the old Parliament House. This would provide some corrective and expansion to the perspective of Burley Griffin. We could not expect him to have had the perspective because his Australian instructors did not that vision either.

As we come now to bid farewell to the Kulin people, let us remember that it was the Kulin nation in 1835 that negotiated the treaty with John Batman. Let us also remember that it was Governor Bourke who invalidated it - an old time Cape York land agreement, you might say. As we go forth, we go with the spirit of apology, but also with the spirit of new life and with new energy and new hope. As we do that, and as we move towards our collective expression of that, I invite Mr Patricic Dodson to join me at the podium. Now, I invite those of you who are not indigenous Australians, and if you are so disposed, to stand and, with me, collectively to express our apology, the words of which are there on the screen.

"We who are recent migrants and descendants of migrants who have come to this land, having attended the Australian Reconciliation Convention, thank you, the Indigenous peoples of Australia gathered at this conference, for your tolerance of us, our cultures and aspirations.

"Also, we apologise for the hurt done to you, your ancestors and your lands by our ancestors and by our presence and our actions in this land over the last 209 years."

Patrick Dodson: I invite you all to stand and to complete the apology in the following words:

"Committed to walking together in this land, we commit ourselves to reconciliation, building better relationships, so that we can constitute a united Australia, respecting the land, valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and providing justice and equity for all."