



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams

Chief Minister's solution on Aboriginal child protection short-sighted, paternalistic — and wrong

SNAICC is disappointed and concerned with NT Chief Minister Adam Giles's remarks that his Government would encourage the adoption of Aboriginal children to non-Aboriginal families.

These comments are short sighted and echo paternalistic attitudes of bygone times.

The NT Government is proposing an ill-conceived 'solution' that runs counter to accepted practices of what is required to best enable children to grow up safe and cared for, and to develop to their fullest potential

And it ignores the lessons of Australian history and the devastating experiences of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families.

No-one would disagree that it is imperative that authorities act in the best interests of the child at all times when making decisions on child protection and placements in alternative care.

However, taking children away for adoption should be seen as a "last resort" option. All children have a fundamental human right to remain connected to their family, their community and their culture.

The causes behind the removal of children are complex. They centre on the legacy of past policies of forced removal, intergenerational effects of separation from family and culture, poverty and a lack of basic services, and perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing practices.

Unless and until we redress these causes, sustainable change will not happen.

Aboriginal children account for 80 per cent of all children in care in the NT, with two-thirds of these children currently placed with non-Aboriginal carers, and only one third having Cultural Care Plans.

The dramatically high figures in NT — and in all jurisdictions across Australia — and the disconnection of Aboriginal children with their culture are generating genuine concerns that we are creating another Stolen Generation.

**SNAICC: The national peak body for Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander children**

As the NT peak body for Aboriginal children and families, SAF,T, observed in 2013, hundreds of Aboriginal children are effectively lost in the system without identity, without family and without a voice.

SNAICC agrees with Mr Giles that the system has failed children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. But we say governments have failed in their responsibility to provide essential services and other support to enable families under multiple layers of stress to care for their children.

Rather than talking about adoptions, the NT Government should be improving support for vulnerable Aboriginal families to prevent their children from entering the child protection system.

Evidence demonstrates the benefits of boosting parenting, early intervention and intensive family support programs. In 2012 the NT Government invested \$80 million in out-of-home care services and \$0.5 million in early intervention services. SNAICC urges the Government to address this imbalance and greatly boost investments in prevention and early intervention.

We implore the Giles Government to strive for solutions that keep Aboriginal families together, not tear them apart. We, along with many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the NT and the country, are ready to work with the Government to see this happen.

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