



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation)
Suite 8, First Floor,
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14 March 2018

JOINT STATEMENT FROM ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LEADERS ON THE RECENT MEDIA COVERAGE AROUND CHILD PROTECTION FOR OUR CHILDREN

Melbourne, Australia: We all share responsibilities to ensure the right of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child to be safe and thrive in family, community and culture. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, we hold the safety of our children to be our number one priority. They are the future of our communities. They are our future leaders, educators, nurturers and healers.

Our cultures hold our children as our most sacred responsibility and we never condone any violence or harm against them. It is paramount that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are kept physically, emotionally and psychologically safe and able to thrive in a supportive environment that honours and nurtures their connection to kin, country and culture.

Our children have the same rights and expectations of safety as all Australian children. We recognise and uphold our obligation to report and respond to the harm of our children.

In this there is no ambiguity and there is no double standard.

The recent media coverage that links culture with abuse is simplistic, divisive and destructive. Any accusation that culture is being used as an excuse to harm children is false. Any suggestion that a child's safety would be willingly compromised for the sake of culture is misguided, hurtful and untrue. The vast majority of our children are living in safe environments with their parents, with strong connections to their culture. Culture and child safety are not mutually exclusive.

We need to have a more rational and mature discussion aimed at achieving better social, community, family and individual outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. We must work to ensure that the drivers of child protection intervention are addressed, rather than continuing with a poorly designed and resourced system that reacts when it's too late, after families have already reached breaking point and children have been harmed.

We reject the simplistic and uninformed cries to remove children at risk and permanently adopt them to non-Indigenous families, as this ignores the complexity and severity of the

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underlying causes that have brought us to this point. We all agree children must be kept safe. If a child is removed to ensure their safety, they must have the most appropriate placement with processes, supports and accountabilities in place to ensure their safety and enable cultural continuity and connection.

If we continue to tear families apart without addressing issues including poverty, disadvantage and trauma that underlie neglect and abuse, then the next generation will be removed in even greater numbers.

As a nation, we have a shared responsibility to ensure the right of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child to be safe and thrive in family, community and culture.

ENDS/

This statement is led by the SNAICC Board of Directors and SNAICC Council:

- Sharron Williams, Aboriginal Family Support Services
 - Chair, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children

- Natalie Lewis, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
 - Chair, Family Matters

- Geraldine Atkinson, Lulla's Children and Family Centre
- Rachel Atkinson, Palm Island Community Company Limited
- Lisa Coulson, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
- Tim Ireland, Aboriginal Child Family and Community Centre (AbSec)
- Kathleen Pinkerton, Yorganop Association Incorporated

- Emma Beckett, Muloonbinba Aboriginal Corporation
- Joanne Della Bona, Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre
- Dawn Ross, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- Walter Shaw, Tangentyere Council
- Megan Van Den Berg, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

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