

## CHAPTER 10

### RECOGNITION OF CHILD MIGRANTS

*Our existence needs to be acknowledged and the deprivation experienced needs acknowledgment.*<sup>1</sup>

10.1 In response to term of reference (d), the Committee received considerable evidence arguing that there was a need for a formal acknowledgment and/or an apology by Australian governments for the human suffering arising from the child migration schemes. Evidence to the Committee argued that Australian governments and the receiving agencies should acknowledge their responsibility for the often deleterious and long-lasting impact of the child migration policy on the lives of many former child migrants.<sup>2</sup>

10.2 Evidence to the inquiry also indicated that there was a need to recognise the role of former child migrants and the important part that they have played in the nation's history. This issue is also discussed in this chapter.

#### **The need for recognition**

##### *Defining acknowledgment and apology*

10.3 Much of the evidence received argued for a formal apology to be issued by the Commonwealth and/or State Governments. Some evidence, however, suggested that an 'acknowledgment' of past practices would suffice.

10.4 Generally the evidence discussed the need for an apology or an acknowledgment in general terms; the terms 'apology' and 'acknowledgment' were often used interchangeably without being precisely defined; nor was there much discussion on how an apology should be worded.

10.5 The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines an apology as a 'regretful acknowledgment of fault or failure; assurance that no offence was intended; an explanation; or vindication', whereas to 'acknowledge', by contrast, is to 'agree to the truth of; own to knowing; take notice of; or recognise the authority or claims of'.

10.6 The Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee has noted in a recent report that 'an apology, by definition, is a "frank acknowledgment", by way of reparation, of offence given, or an explanation that offence was not intended, with "expression of regret"... By these definitions, an expression of regret may be seen as something less than an apology as it is only one aspect of a complete apology.' The report also defined an 'acknowledgment' as involving a public recognition that an event

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1 Submission No.82, p.3.

2 See, for example, Submission No.50, p.6 (Barnardos); *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.530.

happened and ‘that this was the result of policy, as well as practice, and that these policies and practices created devastating consequences. In addition, acknowledgment involves an acceptance or responsibility for these policies, practices and consequences’.<sup>3</sup>

*Apologies/acknowledgments to former child migrants*

10.7 With the exception of Western Australia and Queensland, Australian Governments to date have been reluctant to formally apologise for Australia’s part in the child migration schemes.

10.8 The Commonwealth Government’s view was that it would be ‘inappropriate’ to make a formal apology ‘for well-intentioned past schemes which may have had unforeseen and unintended consequences in some cases, particularly when those schemes were arranged and administered in conjunction with a whole range of other government and private agencies.’<sup>4</sup> The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) stated that:

The Australian Government’s position on this issue as indicated in the Australian Government Response, agrees with that of the British Government, which, while offering sincere regrets to those who see themselves as scarred by the experience of child migration, agreed that the prevailing mood is to move forward positively and concentrate on improving support and assistance for those former child migrants who may need or want such services.<sup>5</sup>

10.9 The South Australian Government issued an official acknowledgment in February 2001 recognising the experiences of former child migrants. The acknowledgment was made on the occasion of the unveiling of a commemorative plaque dedicated to former British child at the South Australian Migration Museum. The statement read, *inter alia*:

Many of the former child migrants tell us that they suffered greatly as a result of their being sent to Australia...The Government of SA wishes to acknowledge that these experiences, though not intended by the schemes, may have occurred and been suffered by the child migrants.<sup>6</sup>

10.10 The full text of the acknowledgment is reproduced at Appendix 7.

10.11 As noted above, in Western Australia and Queensland formal apologies have been issued. In Western Australia, the Western Australian Legislative Assembly

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3 *Healing: A Legacy of Generations*, Report by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, November 2000, pp.111-112.

4 Submission No.42, p.39 (DIMA).

5 Submission No.42, pp.39-40 (DIMA).

6 See Appendix 7.

passed a motion in August 1998 apologising to former child migrants. The statement read:

That this House apologise to the former child migrants on behalf of all Western Australians for the past policies that led to their forced migration and the subsequent maltreatment so many experienced, and express deep regret at the hurt and distress that this caused.<sup>7</sup>

10.12 In Queensland, the Forde Commission into the abuse of children in Queensland institutions recommended that the Queensland Government and the responsible religious authorities issue a formal apology to former child residents of Queensland institutions ‘acknowledging the significant harm done to some children in Queensland institutions’.<sup>8</sup> In August 1999 the Queensland Government and the responsible religious authorities issued a formal apology that included the following statement:

We sincerely apologise to all those people who suffered in any way while resident in our facilities, and express deep sorrow and regret at the hurt and distress suffered by those who were victims of abuse.<sup>9</sup>

The full text of the apology is reproduced at Appendix 7. A copy of the apology has been distributed to, and is available for, former child residents of Queensland institutions including child migrants.

10.13 A number of Catholic religious congregations involved in the care of child migrants have also made formal statements of apology and regret. In July 1993, the Christian Brothers in Western Australia acknowledged that physical and sexual abuse took place in their institutions in Western Australia and published a statement of apology to former child migrants who had been in their care. The apology stated inter alia that:

the fact that such physical and sexual abuse took place at all in some of our institutions cannot be excused and is for us a source of deep shame and regret. Such abuse violates the child’s dignity and sense of self-worth... We, the Christian Brothers of today, therefore unreservedly apologise to those individuals who were victims of abuse in these institutions.<sup>10</sup>

10.14 In 1997, the Sisters of Mercy in Rockhampton and the Catholic diocese of Rockhampton also issued a public apology for abuses that occurred to children under

7 Submission No.135, p.14 (WA Department for Family & Children’s Services).

8 Queensland Government, *Queensland Government Response to Recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions*, August 1999, p.41.

9 Apology cited in Submission No.146, p.4 (Queensland Government).

10 The statement of apology was published in *The Australian* and *The West Australian* on 3 July 1993. It is cited in Gill, A, *Orphans of the Empire*, Random House, Sydney, 1998, p.745. The full text of this statement of apology is in Appendix 7.

their care.<sup>11</sup> Also in 1997 an apology was made on behalf of the Catholic Church in Britain during a journey of former child migrants who participated in the *Sentimental Journey*. The Child Migrant Friendship Society (CMFS) stated that the apology ‘was an enormous help in the healing process that is essential to the emotional health of those who were so adversely impacted by this program’.<sup>12</sup>

10.15 In 1999, an apology was made by the Salesian Order and a plaque dedicated by a group of former child migrants at the former St John Bosco Boys’ Town in Hobart. A former child migrant from the Home stated that it was ‘an acknowledgment and recognition of the child migrants at Boys Town who through hardship and trying times were part of the history of the school. The word “sorry” to the English Migrants by the head of the Salesian Order capped off the dedication plaque’.<sup>13</sup> The former child migrant stated, however, that ‘we hope [the plaque dedication and apology were] not signs of tokenism but a genuine attempt to reconcile the hurt and pain still suffered by these Child Migrants’.<sup>14</sup>

10.16 On 22 March 2001, at a public hearing of this Committee, the Catholic Church’s Joint Liaison Group on Child Migration (Joint Liaison Group) on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Committee for Migrants and Refugees and the National Executive of the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, issued a public apology ‘to all those men and women who suffered because of their experiences as child migrants at Catholic institutions... We are painfully aware that some children suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and this is a source of deep shame and regret for us. We are sorry that some of those vulnerable children who should have found care and protection on our Catholic institutions suffered abuse’.<sup>15</sup> This apology is also reproduced at Appendix 7.

10.17 The Committee questioned the Joint Liaison Group as to whether the apology was made on behalf of the Catholic Church as a whole. The Liaison Group stated that ‘insofar as the Catholic Church was involved in child migration, the Catholic Church is apologising’. The Liaison Group added that:

I think you can assume it speaks on behalf of those agencies listed on the first page of our submission. The media release that has gone out today with the apology is headed “Catholic Church’s child migrant apology”. I think that for the man and woman in the street, **the Catholic Church has made a public apology**.<sup>16</sup>

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11 Submission No.54, p.17 (JLG).

12 Submission No.44, p.44 (CMFS).

13 Submission No.118, p.3

14 Submission No.118, p.5

15 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, pp.483-44 (JLG).

16 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.504 (JLG) – emphasis added.

10.18 The Liaison Group noted ‘our statement of apology today reflects this group’s recognition that Catholic agencies have been a part of the failings of child migration schemes and a part of the harm done to individuals by these schemes’.<sup>17</sup>



*Br Shanahan delivers the apology on behalf of the Catholic Church at the Sydney hearing*

10.19 In the United Kingdom, the UK Health Committee report into the welfare of former British child migrants recommended to the British Government that ‘an apology is in order but think that the best acknowledgment would be for the British Government to take urgent action on the recommendations in this report’.<sup>18</sup> The British Government’s response to the Committee’s report argued out that while the child migration policies were misguided they were conducted within the relevant laws of Britain and the receiving countries at the time. The British Government offered sincere regrets to those who saw themselves scarred by the experience of child migration. The Government agreed that the prevailing mood is to move forward positively and concentrate on improving support and assistance for former child migrants.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Views on the need for an apology*

10.20 The Committee received a wide range of views on the question of the need for an apology in the Australian context. Some evidence suggested the urgent need for an apology; other evidence argued that an apology to be effective needed to be

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17 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.485 (JLG).

18 House of Commons, Health Committee, *The Welfare of Former British Child Migrants*, HC 755, Session 1997-98, para. 118.

19 UK Government Response to the Third Report from the Health Committee, Session 1997-98, pp.2-3.

accompanied by practical measures of support and assistance; while other evidence saw little need for an apology.

10.21 As noted above, a large number of organisations and individuals argued for a formal apology by the Commonwealth and/or the State Governments. For example, the Joint Liaison Group argued that the Commonwealth Government should follow the lead of the Western Australian Government in making ‘a formal statement of Apology and Regret to former child migrants’.<sup>20</sup>

10.22 Submissions arguing for an apology suggested that a formal apology by Australian governments is an essential part of the acknowledgment of the seriously flawed nature of the policy of child migration, and of the responsibility of the Commonwealth and the State Governments for the devastating effect of this policy on many individuals. The CMFS argued that such an apology ‘as well as being an acknowledgment of the responsibility of government, would promote emotional and psychological healing among those who have been most hurt by the impact of this policy’.<sup>21</sup>

10.23 The CMFS stated that a formal apology by the Australian Government ‘would acknowledge that what happened to these people as children was wrong, and that government(s) as well as other agencies failed to provide the protection, supervision, care and encouragement to which they were entitled’.<sup>22</sup> The Society added that:

The Child Migration Policy was wrong in conception and, due to the dereliction of the duty of care and supervision to those in its care, government at the least permitted and in many cases abetted not only lack of care but actual and criminal abuse. The culpability of others does not, however, remove the culpability of Australian government(s).<sup>23</sup>

10.24 The International Association of Former Child Migrants and their Families argued that the majority of its members wanted an apology. The Association noted that they ‘feel that if the injustices they have suffered because of the Australian Government’s role in the child migration schemes, and its failure to protect their human rights, are to be acknowledged and accepted; that an apology from the Prime Minister is vitally important’.<sup>24</sup>

10.25 Submissions also suggested that an apology would assist in the healing and reconciliation process. The Joint Liaison Group stated that:

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20 Submission No.54, p.19 (JLG). See also Submission No.44, p.7 (CMFS); Submission No.15, p.4 (Dr Coldrey).

21 Submission No.44, p.7 (CMFS).

22 Submission No.44, p.7 (CMFS).

23 Submission No.44, p.7 (CMFS).

24 Submission No.129, p.40 (IAFCM&F). See also *Committee Hansard*, 26.3.01, p568 (IAFCM&F)

There is no doubt that formal acknowledgment and apology has a role to play in the process of healing and reconciliation. A public apology need not imply compensation or other negative legal ramifications. It is true that an apology on its own can be seen as lip-service and mere words. However, an apology accompanied by action is certainly more meaningful than the actions alone, crucial as they are.<sup>25</sup>

10.26 Dr Coldrey stated that an official apology ‘might assist some as part of a reconciliation process’ and is ‘important’ to certain former child migrants.<sup>26</sup> Mr Gill also noted that ‘I do not see it [an official apology] as opening the floodgates to fanciful and excessive compensation demands’.<sup>27</sup>

10.27 Evidence also indicated that an apology would mean that the experiences of child migrants will at last be ‘believed’. A common theme in submissions to the inquiry was that child migrants most of all wanted to be ‘believed’ as adults – as they were not believed as children. Many former child migrants also indicated that it was vitally important that their experiences as child migrants be ‘believed’ by governments in particular. One former child migrant stated that:

Those in Government who minimise the damage of these schemes fail to live in the real world and act in a defensive way which adds further to our burden. Most child migrants live with raging anger at the injustice of our experiences. Be decent. Acknowledge the past – it’s part of Australian and British history.<sup>28</sup>

10.28 Another former child migrant stated that ‘the Australian Government must try to right the wrongs and clear its conscience by at least admitting to what happened’.<sup>29</sup>

10.29 Many former child migrants indicated that a formal apology was important to them as an acknowledgment of their past treatment and recognition of their ‘existence’. One former child migrant stated that ‘our existence needs to be acknowledged’.<sup>30</sup>

10.30 Another submission noted that

I think that an official apology would be a good thing. Something along the lines of a recognition that a great wrong was perpetrated to a great many people.<sup>31</sup>

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25 Submission No.54, p.17 (JLG).

26 Submission No.15, p.4 (Dr Coldrey). See also *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, pp.222,235 (Dr Coldrey).

27 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.512 (Mr Gill).

28 Submission No.123, p.4.

29 Submission No.73, p.2.

30 Submission No.82, p.3.

31 Submission No.76, p.3.

10.31 Former child migrants also saw an apology as an acknowledgment to their parents of the ‘wrongs’ done to them.<sup>32</sup> A former child migrant stated:

I was very happy to hear the Catholic Church offer an apology this morning, because a year ago I asked them for an apology on behalf of my mother. I was taking soil from her grave in Melbourne back to Ireland to bury in her ancestral plot... They did not do that. That would have meant a lot to me and it would have given closure. I could have told my mother that she could rest in peace.<sup>33</sup>

10.32 Some former child migrants also saw an apology as an acknowledgment to their own families who in many cases have suffered and continue to suffer along ‘with’ the former child migrant. One former child migrant stated that an apology is needed ‘to parents still living who were never informed of what became of their children’.<sup>34</sup> One submission noted that ‘it must also be remembered that it is not only the former migrants who continue to suffer emotional distress. There is a “knock-on” effect and their partners and children are also likely to be deeply affected’.<sup>35</sup>

10.33 Some submissions argued that the receiving agencies should also issue apologies for their role in the child migration schemes.<sup>36</sup> One submission, referring to the role of the Catholic Church, argued that ‘each of the religious Orders should acknowledge its role and make an apology in keeping with its particular failings. However, it was the Bishops who “signed up” for the scheme with governments. They chose and nominated the custodian for the child migrants. They failed to exercise proper responsibility and oversight of the scheme’.<sup>37</sup> One former child migrant from Molong demanded an apology ‘from the Fairbridge Society for the lies, and their sadistic, cruel, unlawful and unsafe treatment of young children entrusted to their care’.<sup>38</sup>

10.34 Other evidence suggested that a formal apology without the provision of services and/or financial support is ‘meaningless’ and that any apology needs to be accompanied by practical measures to address needs. The International Association argued that ‘an apology on its own without any backup is a waste of time. An apology is a Pontius Pilate act and just a waste of time on its own...that is what a lot of members have said “Look, what is the use of an apology if nothing else is done?”’.<sup>39</sup>

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32 See Submission No.142, p.2; Submission No.114, p.3.

33 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.530.

34 Submission No.142, p.2.

35 Submission No.148, p.4 (Dr M Fox).

36 Submission No.29, p.3; Submission No.73, p.2; Submission No.120, p.3; Submission No.141, p.3.

37 Submission No.148, p.5 (Dr M Fox).

38 Submission No.73, p.2.

39 *Committee Hansard*, 26.3.01, p.568 (IAFCM&F)



10.35 The Joint Liaison Group noted that any genuine apology implies ‘measures of reparation’.<sup>40</sup> The Liaison Group argued that any further financial support, particularly from governments, should be put into services for former child migrants in the areas of information, family tracing and contact, and counselling and other ‘needs-based’ rehabilitation services.<sup>41</sup> Barnardos Australia also emphasised that the ‘most significant’ issue is the need for governments to provide reparation, that is, financial support for former child migrants, especially in the area of family reunions.<sup>42</sup> The Australian Child Migrant Foundation (ACMF) argued that it was more productive to encourage governments, churches and receiving agencies to provide resources to assist former child migrants now rather than apportion blame. However, the Foundation noted that a ‘no blame’ policy did not absolve governments and the churches and agencies from accepting their responsibilities in relation to former child migrants.<sup>43</sup>

10.36 Other evidence to the inquiry did not support the concept of a public apology. Broken Rites argued that an apology ‘would have no value at all. It does not change the situation of the person who is approaching 51 or 52 with still unresolved psychological problems, et cetera, in very precarious housing situations. An apology means nothing.’<sup>44</sup> However, Broken Rites, conceded that an apology accompanied by compensation ‘would start to mean something’.<sup>45</sup>

10.37 Some former child migrants also argued that an apology was of little value. One former child migrant stated:

You can accept an apology, but you cannot forget...I know they tried their best to apologise and everything; we have got to accept that. But I always say it is too late.<sup>46</sup>

10.38 Another former child migrant stated:

An apology I feel is not enough for the pain and suffering inflicted on me and other child migrants.<sup>47</sup>

10.39 Some receiving agencies also did not support an apology. For example, the Fairbridge Foundation argued that an apology by the Commonwealth Government was ‘unnecessary and inappropriate’ and that it could find no reason why the present Australian Government ‘should apologise on its own behalf, or on the behalf of

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40 Submission No.54, p.17 (JLG).

41 Submission No.54, pp.17-18 (JLG).

42 Submission No.50, p.6 (Barnardos).

43 Submission No.46, pp.5-6 (ACMF).

44 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.264 (Broken Rites).

45 *Committee Hansard*, 15.3.01, p.264 (Broken Rites).

46 *Committee Hansard*, 21.3.01, p.359.

47 Submission No.9, p.6.

previous Australian Governments for anything which they have done in regard to the Fairbridge Farm School at Molong'.<sup>48</sup>

10.40 Interestingly, the thinking appears to be quite different in Canada. The Committee was advised that the Canadian approach emphasises the merits of reconciliation as opposed to the polarisation that necessarily ensues from legal action, however justified. Home Children Canada indicated that the effect of a resolution passed at a 1992 reunion was that: 'We will never ask for retribution. We will never ask for restitution. We will never even ask for an apology! We are glad to be in Canada! We are proud to be Canadians! All we want is easier access to our records.'<sup>49</sup> This Canadian focus on identity and access to records rather than reparation and apology also came through in the Committee members' discussions in Ottawa.

#### *Views on an acknowledgment*

10.41 Some submissions argued that Commonwealth and State Governments, rather than issuing formal apologies, should issue an acknowledgment that past flawed child migration policies occurred and acknowledge the consequences, including the adverse consequences, of these policies. As noted previously, the South Australian Government issued an official acknowledgment this year acknowledging the experiences of former child migrants.

10.42 Evidence to the Committee emphasised the importance of governments acknowledging the hurt and distress suffered by many former child migrants as a result of the child migration schemes. Barnardos stated that:

...Government should acknowledge that child migration was a seriously misguided policy. It should be recognised as part of the acknowledgment that the policy of child migration was undertaken with "good intent". In that sense it is different from the "Stolen Generation" where the intent was "Assimilation", a now abandoned policy.<sup>50</sup>

10.43 One former child migrant stated that:

The Australian and State Governments should formally accept responsibility and acknowledge their failures, which contributed to the human suffering of former child migrants.<sup>51</sup>

10.44 Another submission noted that:

We need our suffering and experiences acknowledged. Australian Federal and State governments should acknowledge that they had and still have a duty of care.<sup>52</sup>

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48 Submission No.43, p.6 (Fairbridge Foundation).

49 Submission No.122, p.5 (Home Children Canada).

50 Submission No.50, p.6 (Barnardos).

51 Submission No.28, p.3.

10.45 Another former child migrant expressed the view that:

It is very important that the government should acknowledge to the former Child Migrants that what occurred was very wrong and never should have happened.<sup>53</sup>

10.46 The Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN), representing former state wards, argued that acknowledgment and recognition is a more pressing need for that organisation than seeking an apology. CLAN argued that:

We want acknowledgment that these things happened [in institutions]. They had terrible effects. To have your history recognised is so important. We all grew up completely unrecognised even as an entity, as a self. Then we were told our histories do not exist either. Acknowledgment is very important.<sup>54</sup>

10.47 A former child migrant also noted that an acknowledgment was more important than an apology:

Acknowledgment that we do exist and are here and how we came to be here. An apology is not required, this would be meaningless and serve no useful purposes whatsoever. Acknowledgment of the personal suffering and deprivation and the long lasting effects our transportation, institutionalisation and secrecy about our families has had on us.<sup>55</sup>

10.48 Another former child migrant also stated that there was a need to acknowledge the past:

it's part of Australian and British history. As we have to acknowledge our personal past, so must those involved in child migration acknowledge their failures to protect the most vulnerable in society.<sup>56</sup>

10.49 The South Australian Department of Human Services also noted that, in relation to former child migrants, 'a formal acknowledgment of their experiences, losses and of the infringement of their rights would be seen as a way of ameliorating some of their suffering'.<sup>57</sup> The Department noted that the Minister of Human Services in launching the plaque at the South Australian Migration Museum commemorating former child migrants 'spoke, in effect, about an expression of regret about events'.<sup>58</sup> The full text of the acknowledgment is at Appendix 7.

52 Submission No.22, p.2.

53 Submission No.89, p.1.

54 *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.465 (CLAN).

55 Submission No.82, p.4.

56 Submission No.123, p.4.

57 Submission No.127, p.7 (SA Department of Human Services).

58 *Committee Hansard*, 16.3.01, p.289 (SA Department of Human Services).

*Conclusion*

10.50 The Committee strongly believes that the Commonwealth Government should issue a formal statement acknowledging its predecessors' role and responsibility in promoting the child migration schemes; and the impact that these schemes had on the lives of many former child migrants. The Committee believes that the statement should express sorrow and regret for the hurt and distress suffered by child migrants, especially those who were the victims of abuse and assault at the hands of those in the institutions who were in charge of them. The Committee believes that while the policies may have been well-intentioned they had, in many cases, unforeseen and unintended consequences.

10.51 The Committee believes that, as the child migration policies were arranged and administered in conjunction with State Governments and the receiving agencies, State Governments and receiving agencies, that have not already done so, should also acknowledge their respective roles in the child migration schemes and the significant harm done to many children in their care in the various institutions across the country.

10.52 The Committee believes that the symbolism of an acknowledgment is important in itself in recognising past wrongs and enables governments and the receiving agencies to accept their responsibilities for past actions in relation to the treatment of child migrants.

10.53 The Committee also considers that an acknowledgment would enable closure to be achieved for many former child migrants. It would also go some way towards promoting emotional and psychological healing so needed by child migrants – the innocent victims of these past policies. An acknowledgment would at last recognise that child migrants have been 'believed' – that their experiences, their traumas, their very existence do count and are accepted for what they are. Many child migrants expressed the view that while they may not have been believed as children, it is imperative that their experiences as child migrants in institutions be 'believed' as adults – especially by governments.

10.54 The Committee further considers that these acknowledgments must be made in conjunction with the other positive measures that have been recommended in this report to ensure that they are not regarded as merely empty rhetoric by child migrants.

10.55 The Committee shares the view of the House of Commons Health Committee that the best acknowledgment for former child migrants is to take urgent action in improving support services and other assistance for former child migrants who may need or want such services. The Committee believes that implementation of the recommendations in this report is a vital step in meeting the legitimate needs and aspirations of former child migrants and that after decades of silence their voices will at last have been heard by the Australian community.

**Recommendation 30: That the Commonwealth Government issue a formal statement acknowledging that its predecessors' promotion of the Child Migration schemes, that resulted in the removal of so many British and Maltese children to Australia, was wrong; and that the statement express deep sorrow and regret for the psychological, social and economic harm caused to the children, and the hurt and distress suffered by the children, at the hands of those who were in charge of them, particularly the children who were victims of abuse and assault.**

**Recommendation 31: That all State Governments and receiving agencies, that have not already done so, issue formal statements similar to those issued by the Western Australian and Queensland Governments and the Catholic Church and associated religious orders to former child migrants and their families for their respective roles in the child migration schemes.**

### **Recognition of the child migrant schemes and the role of child migrants in Australia**

10.56 Submissions and other evidence recognised the need for a suitable memorial or other permanent tribute to be established to provide testimony to the part child migrants have played in Australia's history and to ensure that the experiences of those involved in the child migration schemes are recorded for future generations.

10.57 Evidence indicated a lack of recognition in Australia of the positive contribution that child migrants have made to the nation.<sup>59</sup> The Child Migrant Friendship Society, summarising much of the evidence received on this issue, stated that:

Child migrants came to Australia at the behest of others, and were subject to treatment that was in all cases less than what they deserved and was in many cases brutal...When they left the Australian receiving agencies, they did so without proper education, training or preparation. In the meantime, most had worked hard, often undertaking hard physical labour, to develop the institutions to which they were attached. Many have since struggled to find a fulfilling life journey. Some have gained considerable financial or public success. Many have established sound and effective family lives of their own. **All, despite the deception and abuse of power that brought them here, have helped to forge the reality of contemporary Australia. That contribution deserves acknowledgment.**<sup>60</sup>

10.58 Fairbridge WA stated that:

One of the most pressing needs for child migrants in this country is a recognition of the contribution they have made to this country...There is very little attempt...made by the community to acknowledge and welcome

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59 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.123 (Fairbridge WA); *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.472 (Barnardos); *Committee Hansard*, 22.3.01, p.520 (Professor Sherington).

60 Submission No.44, p.8 (CMFS) – emphasis added.

to the Australian community the successes and the deeds and the contributions that have been made by child migrants.<sup>61</sup>

10.59 The International Association cited as an example of this lack of recognition, the situation of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. While the Museum displays the history of immigrants from all round the world it does not record the history of child migrants or their subsequent contribution to Australia as a nation.<sup>62</sup> One submission noted that an area within the Immigration Museum ‘should be provided to tell the story of the child migration issue, and the terrible things that were done to people by this infamous scheme’.<sup>63</sup> However, aspects of child migration are included in displays at the recently opened National Museum of Australia in Canberra and at the Fremantle Museum in Western Australia.

10.60 The International Association and the Child Migrants Trust argued that the Australian and UK Governments should provide financial and other support for the establishment of an appropriate Centre of Remembrance and Learning in recognition of former child migrants.<sup>64</sup> The Association stated that the centre would be a place where the history of child migration is recorded for future generations:

That can take the form of a building. It can be a building equipped and adorned with memorabilia. It can be historical. It can be on tape played through a video set-up. Again, this is for the experts to determine, but we do believe we need a centre of excellence to ensure that it is recorded that, firstly, this history did happen in this country and, secondly, that it never gets a another opportunity to manifest itself in the manner that it did.<sup>65</sup>

10.61 Some groups representing child migrants suggested that a suitable memorial should be located in Canberra as a national memorial – as the child migration schemes were Commonwealth-sponsored schemes.<sup>66</sup> Other groups, however suggested that memorials should be located in the various States. The CMFS, among others, suggested that a memorial should be erected in Fremantle as it was the port of entry for most child migrants to Western Australia. The Society suggested that the memorial, cast in bronze, could depict a group of four or five children carrying only a small suitcase with an appropriate inscription attached to the memorial. Similar memorials could be erected in other states.<sup>67</sup> Another submission suggested that a

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61 *Committee Hansard*, 16.2.01, p.123 (Fairbridge WA).

62 Submission No.129, p.42 (IAFCM&F).

63 Submission No.37, p.4.

64 Submission No.129, p.42 (IAFCM&F).

65 *Committee Hansard*, 26.3.01, p.566 (IAFCM&F). See also Submission No.10, pp.1-2.

66 *Committee Hansard*, 26.3.01, p.566 (IAFCM&F).

67 Submission No.44, p.9 (CMFS).

sculptured memorial should be erected in at least two locations in memory of child migrants.<sup>68</sup>

10.62 Fairbridge WA informed the Committee that it is constructing memorials to child migrants at Pinjarra including a sculpture of Kingsley Fairbridge and a number of children as a memorial both to the founder of the Fairbridge scheme and the contribution that child migrants have made to Australia.<sup>69</sup> A plaque commemorating British child migrants who came to South Australia was recently unveiled at the South Australian migration museum. Members of the Committee had an opportunity to view this plaque while in Adelaide for the public hearing.



*Senators Murray, Crowley and Tchen view the commemorative plaque at the South Australia Migration Museum*

10.63 In Canada, a number of plaques have been erected at various sites throughout the country to commemorate the memory of Canadian Home Children (child migrants).<sup>70</sup> On 19 August 2001 the Canadian Government through its Ministry of Canadian Heritage unveiled an historical plaque at a former receiving home in Ontario as a tangible reminder that the story of Canadian Home Children was of national historical significance. In addition to Home Children and their families, representatives from sending and receiving agencies, support groups, government, the National Archives and ISS were in attendance. The opportunity was taken for all these groups and people involved with Home Children to meet as a conference and discuss

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68 Submission No.36, p.6.

69 Submission No.136, Additional Information, 27.4.01 (Fairbridge WA).

70 Submission No.122, pp.16-17 (Home Children Canada).

mutual problems, policy, access to and availability of records in both Canada and the United Kingdom, and other relevant issues.<sup>71</sup>

10.64 Another area of activity commented on during the inquiry was the importance of collecting oral histories. The Child Migrants Trust stated that it has initiated a Oral History Project in Australia and in the United Kingdom arguing that it ‘is a vital component to ensuring the experiences of former Child Migrants and their families are not lost to us now, or in the future’.<sup>72</sup> Both the Trust and the International Association argued that the Government should provide financial support so that the project may be completed.<sup>73</sup> The Committee notes that in relation to the recording of oral histories, the written submissions and transcripts of evidence to this inquiry will prove invaluable. In Canada, Home Children Canada has videotaped oral histories of home children to be donated to the National Archives of Canada.<sup>74</sup>

10.65 The Committee was also informed of details of the First International Congress on Child Migration, organised by the Child Migrants Trust and the International Association to be held in the United States in 2001. It is proposed that the Congress discuss past and present practice and policy issues surrounding child migration. It is anticipated that the Congress will attract international experts, academics and practitioners from a variety of professions and disciplines, including law, psychiatry, social work and social policy. The Trust and the International Association argued that the Commonwealth Government should participate in this Congress and that funding be provided by the Government to assist participants in attending the Congress.<sup>75</sup>

10.66 The Child Migrants’ Sending Agencies Group argued that an international congress organised and funded by governments involved in child migration is needed as ‘we have been very aware that professional work in the field of child migration has seen minimal sharing of professional practice and research’.<sup>76</sup> The Sending Agencies Group regretted that that the Congress organised by the Trust and the International Association will be held in the United States and not in Australia, Canada or New Zealand, which received the majority of child migrants. The Sending Agencies Group also stated that ‘we believe that the conference will not engage governments in the funding and facilitation of professional development’.<sup>77</sup> Members of the Group discussed with the Committee in London the format of an international conference. They envisaged that such a conference should be practice-based, to include workshops

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71 Submission No.122, Additional Information, 25.8.01 (Home Children Canada).

72 Submission No.132, p.46 (CMT).

73 Submission No.132, p.46 (CMT); Submission No.129, p.46 (IAFCM&F).

74 Submission No.122, p.17 (Home Children Canada).

75 Submission No.132, p.46 (CMT); Submission No.129, p.46 (IAFCM&F); *Committee Hansard*, 26.3.01, p.587 (CMT). See also Submission No.123, p.5.

76 Submission No.52, p.4 (Child Migrants’ Sending Agencies Group).

77 Submission No.52, p.4 (Child Migrants’ Sending Agencies Group).



with practitioners, and to discuss uniform protocols in best practice for the delivery of services to former child migrants internationally.

10.67 The Committee believes that the Commonwealth Government should support international initiatives that aim to promote the sharing of professional best practice and uniformity of protocols in relation to work with former child migrants and their families. The UK Department of Health advised the Committee in London that it would give full support to an international conference, though not necessarily financial, and noted that an agenda was for the agencies and Trust to determine.

### *Conclusion*

10.68 The Committee strongly believes that Australia must recognise the positive contributions that former child migrants have made to the nation. The Committee considers that as part of this recognition process, the Commonwealth and State Governments, and the receiving agencies should fund a suitable memorial or memorials commemorating former child migrants, their history and their contribution to Australian life. Such action would also be part of a tangible acknowledgment by governments and agencies of their roles in child migration to Australia.

10.69 The Committee believes that a series of memorials could be located around the country, with one established in Canberra as a national memorial and others in the various States, especially Fremantle, as it was the port of entry for most child migrants to Australia. The Committee also considers that the Commonwealth Government should consult widely with former child migrants and groups representing former child migrants with a view to establishing a suitable memorial or memorials.

**Recommendation 32: That the Commonwealth and State Governments, in conjunction with the receiving agencies, provide funding for the erection of a suitable memorial or memorials commemorating former child migrants, and that the appropriate form and location(s) of such a memorial or memorials be determined by consulting widely with former child migrants and their representative organisations.**

**Recommendation 33: That the Commonwealth Government support and promote international initiatives that facilitate the sharing of professional best practice, and that ensure uniformity of protocols relating to work with former child migrants and their families.**

Senator the Hon Rosemary Crowley

Chair

