

Senator BOYCE

I would very much like to endorse the comments made by my fellow members of the Community Affairs References Committee on this report and inquiry. I did not have the honour of being involved in the previous two inquiries but from the work that we did on this I now have just a small taste of the problems that have been experienced by the forgotten Australians and the lost innocents. My own particular area of interest is disability, and within the disability sphere there have been many, many examples of horrific abuse and trauma experienced by people, not only by those who are present in the gallery today but by many others as well.

I particularly acknowledge the support of the secretariat in producing this report at what has been a very busy time. The secretary of the committee, Mr Elton Humphery, was involved in the earlier inquiries and the wisdom and patience that he was able to bring to this inquiry was very helpful to all of us. I would also like to pick up on the comment made by my colleague Senator Humphries in his description of this as a 'disgraceful chapter' in Australia's history. It is a disgraceful chapter in not only the history of Australia but also many other countries. The reports of the Irish inquiry are horrific in their description of abuse, time after time, in church-run institutions. Government departments just let it happen in the case of more than 250,000 children in Ireland.

It was a disgraceful chapter in Australia's history, but it is not a closed chapter. In my view there are two reasons why it is not a closed chapter. It is partly because we have not fully redressed the hurt and injuries done to the lost innocents and forgotten Australians. As the report points out, what this requires is a full and real apology from all the players involved—the federal government, the state governments and real action from the churches. I would like to read briefly from our report:

The Committee received very little evidence in relation to statements issued by churches and agencies since the Forgotten Australians report, which reflects the fact that there has been little action by churches and agencies since that time.

We hope that our call for the Prime Minister to use his authority to push the churches into real action—real apology and real attempts at redress rather than public relations stunts that sweep things under the carpet—will actually happen. The other reason that I think this is not a closed chapter is that although it is far more subtle and far less out in the open, institutionalisation is still happening in Australia and the damage of it is still being felt by Australians. Time after time we have been having state governments, supported by federal government funding, developing institutions. They might be smaller but they are never going to be any better. I would like to briefly conclude by using a quote from the *Irish Times* in relation to the Irish inquiry which I think is just as relevant to us here. It said, 'Abuse was not the failure of the system. It was the system.'