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**From:** Georgia Babatsikos [mailto:geobabs@hotmail.com]

**Sent:** Saturday, 7 August 2004 10:42 PM

**To:** indigenouaffairs@aph.gov.au; Committee, Indigenous Affairs (SEN)

**Subject:** Recommendations to Senate Select Committee

Jonathon Curtis

Secretary

Senate Select Committee

Indigenous Affairs

Saturday 7 August 2004

Dear Committee,

My name is Georgia Babatsikos and I am a PhD student in Violence Prevention at James Cook University (Cairns). Though born and raised in Australia, I have lived and worked in the ghettos in the USA for 18 years, working with drug dealers, murders, seeing bullets flying over my head, and I have never seen the kind of aggression, self-loathing, and self-destruction that I have seen here in Australia (Cairns specifically) in the Aboriginal community. After extensive research here recently (as we were never taught this is school growing up in Australia), I realize that this is learned or trained, as the nature of Aboriginal life for 40 to 50,000 years before the arrival of Europeans was relatively peaceful. Treat people with violence, treat them like animals, and they will take on those characteristics, but that is not human nature. Human nature, anthropologically speaking, is to have pride and thrive, as is demonstrated in traditional cultures around the world pre-colonization. Having understood more recently the exact nature of the treatment of Aborigines by Europeans (myself being of European descent) in Australia has made me realize the absolute decimation of the culture and spirit of Aborigines that took place. Saying sorry does not even come close to sympathizing with a more than oppressed peoples. I am always amazed at how, when I lived in America, Australians would criticize the Americans for their racism. What I see here is 100 times worse, the belief that Aborigines are less than human and innately prone to violence and self-degradation. They are anything but that. Their knowledge of certain aspects of life that do not have to do with the current materialistic trappings of home improvement, buying and selling real estate, dining in fine restaurants, and attaining a formal education (in the European sense of a university) is priceless and compliments the contribution of Europeans. Their knowledge has been developed and refined over a much longer period of time than Europeans and involves group harmony, wisdom and intelligence beyond the 10% of the brain that most people use in the modern world, as well as an innate understanding of nature. That understanding of nature allowed for a respectful existence on Australian soil that basically caused no environmental damage. This is

why Australia was in pristine condition when Europeans arrived. The damage we have done after a little over 100 years here (in this region) has been devastating and irreparable, according to environmentalists, as this is oldest rainforest in the world and one of the most unique wetlands environments in the world.

My suggestion for moving forward from this terrible mess is to take responsibility for our whole family, as in done with families who have experienced violence of this nature, even if we were not the perpetrator. We would do the same for any man woman or child who had been raped, tortured, imprisoned unjustly, or had their babies ripped out of their arms for no good reason. Apologizing and taking responsibility (not as the one who has done it but as one who has human sympathy) and providing support for the recovery and growth of people is the first step in the healing, again as is done in treating families who have experienced such violence. As in families, we do not expect everyone to act the same and be dictated to by some tyrannical father, but rather want to nurture their individual growth in a safe and healthy environment, so we must do with society in Australia. If we do not, the problems in Australia will just get worse, and we will be no different than all of the other dysfunctional modern societies (the USA included) that are becoming sicker at the core because of the plowing over of humans for the sake of economic prosperity.

My recommendations, after many years of community development work in my field, are:

- Allow self-determination of Aboriginal people. There are many aboriginal people and many groups, and this will be different for different groups. Only they know what they want. We must listen and reach a compromise. Tactics of conflict resolution as developed by my former US President Jimmy Carter at the Carter Center in the USA will be useful here. This also includes the encouragement of Aboriginal culture and not mainstreaming. It would be awful if we lost these beautiful cultures and were all the same. Diversity is natural. Imagine if there were only one type of bird or mammal or insect or tree or flower!!!! The earth as we know it would be dead.
- Reparations are essential. Small payments by each Australian for a limited period of time (eg \$5 per week for 10 years) will allow for return of stolen wages, purchase of land, and other activities self determined by Aboriginal people's. It's the rent we pay for living in this beautiful wonderland. There are enough amazing Aboriginal people doing amazing things so that this money would be wisely spent (listen to national indigenous radio talk back program "Talk Black" every morning broadcast in 48 communities across Australia to be utterly informed and inspired by aboriginal people, their progress and their big hearts, despite everything that has happened).
- Comprehensive and explicit education about the history of European arrival in Australia and its effect on Aboriginals for all Australians so that we can become wiser and so that we will better understand the

struggles and devastation experienced and find love in our hearts to listen to the stories/truths and share our support and disapproval for past atrocities so that it will never happen again. That, in fact, will be half of the healing.

Australia will be a much more prosperous nation, not just by financial measures, if we are able to really be proactive about this. We can lead the world, be the example. People will watch us blossom, study us, and say “They had the guts to stand up and do something REALLY intelligent... They are truly enlightened.”

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you should have any questions or if you should require any specifics about the practical implementation of recommendations.

Good luck with your task. I am at your service.

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