

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
LAUNCH OF THE AUSTRALIAN DIALOGUE, THE GLOBAL FOUNDATION
ATLANTIC, DOCKLANDS, MELBOURNE
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I acknowledge the traditional keepers of the land on which we gather today:

- . their sacred dreamings and spirit;
- . and the efforts of those who have followed,
- . in valuing their rich heritage and offering,
- . and ensuring the passage and survival of a culture, against all odds.

And I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for inviting me to join you at this pause in a most important conversation, to talk with you in an atmosphere of such generosity and positivity, charged by rigour, fine intellect and intrepid debate.

Of course, I can't help but recall that special day in May this year at Government House in Brisbane, when I was privileged to host and be part of your Roundtable, *Partnerships for Indigenous Success*.

It was a day drenched with the same feel and drive as this one:

- . a genuine commitment by all to forging creative, productive and respectful relationships between indigenous entrepreneurs and the established business sector;
- . there was a gratitude for the work of the Global Foundation and its Roundtable in seeking to shape Australia's future and global role;
- . there was a willingness to freely engage in discussion about the vast possibilities, unhampered by the disparagement that notions of "blue sky" usually attract;
- . and there was a warmth, an energy, an openness and inclusiveness that fuelled and cradled every exchange.

When I think of that day, it simply makes me smile a smile of hope:

- . a blazing beacon marking a better way forward;
- . a sentry too: guarding what is so precious, reminding us of our responsibilities, hoping that we have the courage and capacity to fulfill them.

During the Dr Charles Perkins Memorial Oration last week, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma:

- . spoke of working in partnership with indigenous peoples, rather than treating them as passive recipients;

. he spoke of indigenous rights as human rights, the rights we all expect to enjoy.

The preface remains: that across every facet of life - access to health care, health risk factors, water, sanitation, diet, education, employment, income, housing, wellbeing and opportunity - there is an unconscionable disparity between indigenous and non indigenous Australians.

In 2005, in Brisbane, the International Conference on Engaging Communities was held.

There was a workshop called, *Engaging the Marginalised*.

The participants talked about the need to build sustainable partnerships between governments, the private sector, civil society, and indigenous peoples.

Partnerships:

. that are founded on human-rights principles of non discrimination and equality;

. that recognise cultural diversity;

. that require full and effective participation by indigenous people;

. and that acknowledge, develop, and support the existing social capital and strengths of indigenous communities.

Former Social Justice Commissioner, Professor Mick Dodson, has reminded us that:

. there are very few examples of success that don't involve these sorts of partnerships - they are the future for reconciliation;

. confidence grows when people and their cultures are treated with respect - confidence gives indigenous people remarkable strength to overcome disadvantage.

And he said last year, the 40th anniversary of Australia's 1967 referendum, that telling stories of the referendum is one way to give meaning to our citizenship.

The real work was done in the kitchens, camps, and community halls... Reconciliation will be achieved in an everyday way, in the everyday places of our cities and towns.

Over the last couple of weeks, Michael and I have journeyed the Murray Darling Basin. We've been welcomed into its kitchens, camps and community halls, its everyday places.

Women and men, young people, families, elders and leaders, set aside their troubled times to open their arms to us and lead us into their lives and communities.

How fortunate we were to pull up a chair at the table, share a blanket on the riverbank, get sand in our shoes, even have a few laughs, with these people whose livelihoods and spirits have been almost eviscerated by the workings of nature and human action over decades.

I reflected at the end of my term as Governor of Queensland that my impression of those five years was, in the main, as a voice and ear in tens of thousands of conversations.

Today, in a new role, they continue: different threads of a broader, national narrative.

Somewhere in the meeting of minds and touching of hearts, trust and respect put down their roots, nurturing a dialogue that remains always open.

The duty of public office must, at the very least, be to listen to the stories of our communities, and to

draw upon the depth and diversity of opinion and experience that is the fabric of Australian life.

People must know that they have been heard, and we must ensure that others have heard them too, so that we can go on to explore ground upon which we might be prepared to stand and work together.

You call the *Australian Dialogue* a "citizen's movement".

What kind of public talk does it take to engage people in civic life, to involve us in addressing public problems?

I have found this response useful:

- . it requires two powerful but unusual marriages:
- . the first, is between dialogue - that is constructive, honest, dispels stereotypes and promotes mutual listening and understanding - and, related to that, deliberation - the use of critical thinking and reasoning in decision making;
- . the second union is between community organising and deliberative dialogue;
- . it's not enough to bring people into the conversation and then conclude that their dialogue and deliberation have worked because it worked inside that circle alone;
- . the conversation must have meaning and impact in our broader public life.

Australia's well known social researcher, Hugh Mackay, has indicated in his latest work that:

...there's a new alertness [among Australians];

more generally, a nagging sense that we might need to take another look at the big picture.

My friends, you are indeed well placed to initiate:

- . this dialogue and deliberation across the Australian community;
- . this public talk that welcomes everyone, and is intent on bringing about widespread action and change.

Lt General John Sanderson and Mr Patrick Dodson, I sincerely praise:

- . your work in developing the objectives and methodology for the Dialogue;
- . your pragmatic approaches to civic engagement of our indigenous and non-indigenous citizens;
- . your insights into the needs, vulnerabilities, and untapped potential of rural and remote Australia;
- . and your inspiration to our public, private, community and philanthropic sectors to place themselves, together with you, at the centre of this groundbreaking, nation-changing agenda.

Oodgeroo wrote her Song of Hope in celebration of the '67 referendum triumph.

It was written over 40 years ago, but it could so easily have been penned on the day Australia apologised to our Stolen Generation, only eight months ago.

Now we have a second chance to affirm her hope:

*Look up, my people,
The dawn is breaking,
The world is waking*

*To a bright new day,
When none defame us,
No restriction tame us,
Nor colour shame us,
Nor sneer dismay.*

*So long we waited
Bound and frustrated,
Till hate be hated
And caste deposed;
Now light shall guide us,
No goal denied us,
And all doors open
That long were closed.
To our fathers' fathers
The pain, the sorrow;
To our children's children
The glad tomorrow.*

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my greatest honour to now officially launch the Australian Dialogue, and I look forward very much to being part of many more conversations.

Thank you.