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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

20th Anniversary of the 'Bringing Them Home' Report

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I thank the member for Wyong, David Harris, for bringing the discussion of this matter of public importance to this place and I thank the member for Coogee for his heartfelt contribution to the debate.

In this place, I represent the people of the Darug and Gundungurra nations living in the Blue Mountains electorate and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

Today marks 20 years since the delivery of the "Bringing Them Home" report by the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their families—a damning report. What we also now know is the intergenerational impact of the hurt, grief and loss felt by parents and their children as a result of the forced removal of young Aboriginal people from their families.

The "Bringing Them Home" report documented the experiences of grief and loss felt by those stolen children and their parents. The evidence contained in the report—testimonies from children and parents—is harrowing reading. I encourage those who have not read the report to seek out these testimonies and learn from them the shocking and confronting circumstances of the forced removals of children from families across this country.

I am concerned though that despite the "Bringing Them Home" report, despite the inquiry and its evidence and its findings, 20 years later there is still such a gulf of disadvantage and injustice between members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the rest of the population.

This is in part because of the period of time over which these forced removals were perpetrated, the sheer number of people impacted, and the time it took after these practices finally ended for Australia and its people to engage with and begin discussing the injustice and hurt perpetrated by Federal and State governments in their names.

The report found that the policies of forced removal and assimilation could be considered genocide. Official policy and legislation for Indigenous families and children was contrary to accepted legal principle imported into Australia as British common law and, from late 1946, constituted a crime against humanity.

The gulf of disadvantage and injustice continues to this day, because the recovery process—the healing—has not been concluded, and because our Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander community continues to experience systemic and pervasive racism and discrimination. I note that more Indigenous children are being removed today than at any other time in Australian history—they are 10 times more likely to be in care than their non-Indigenous peers. More than that, these figures continue to worsen.

So the action plan for healing from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation says, "Heal our past; build our future."

As one of the elders has said, "This must be actioned. It is time to finish this business."