

Speech at opening of

Courage to Care

In Bathurst

By

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Ladies and Gentlemen, we are here on ancient traditional land, and may I thank the elders of the Wiradjuri People for inviting me to share their beautiful country with them today.

It would be difficult to imagine a moment in history when an exhibition such as Courage to Care has been more needed by the global community. Since September 11th, there has been a horrific escalation in fear throughout the world, and with fear comes its blood brothers, suspicion and hatred.

This exhibition which you see around you, is dedicated towards tolerance and understanding. It shows the difference that the individual can make in a society which has become intolerant of others...of those who practice a different religion, a different lifestyle preference, are of a different race or cultural background, or who profess different values.

At the end of the Second World War, when the true meaning of Nazism and the carnage it wrought was becoming known to the outside world, people were saying that human society could never survive another moment in time such as that...the deaths of an estimated 40 million people. Yet a recent study published by the University of Hawaii shows that close to 200 million people were killed by democide...the deliberate action of governments...during the most murderous of all the centuries of human existence.

There were those of us who naively hoped that by entering the third millennium, we would become a more advanced and civilized society. With such mass-communications as the Internet, television, and satellites, we thought that the spread of knowledge would somehow bring an spirit of enlightenment to the world.

Yet September 11th has shown us that hatred is still the religion of a large percentage of the world's population.

Indeed, if we look at the world, it all seems to have gone strangely askew. We are all feeling insecure at the moment. We can't open a letter without wondering whether it will kill us; we can't enter a large building without fear that it might become our coffin; we can't step on a plane and look at our fellow passengers without wondering whether they will be the cause of our deaths.

Perhaps if we look at the world, not as a center of anarchy as many of us are doing at the moment, but rather from a different perspective, we'll see that ours is just one perspective...and maybe that will show us why there's so much hatred, anger and insecurity.

Just for a moment, let's not think about the world as being East and West, North and South, but let's shrink the earth's population to the size of a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following:

There would be: 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere, both north and south, 8 Africans, 52 would be female, 48 would be male, 70 would be non-white, 30 would be white, 70 would be non-Christian, 30 would be Christian, 89 would be heterosexual, 11 would be homosexual, 6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all 6 would be from the United States.

80 would live in substandard housing, 70 would be unable to read, 50 would suffer from malnutrition, 1 would be near death; 1 would be near birth, only 1 would have a college education and only 1 would own a computer

When we consider our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent.

Now, let's ponder one more thing...

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness... you are more blessed than the one million who will not survive this week. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation ...you are ahead of 500 million people in the world. If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death...you are more blessed than three billion people in the world. If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep...you are richer than 75% of this world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace ... you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. If your parents are still alive and still married ... you are very rare.

And this is why *Courage to Care* is so important. This is not the time or place to discuss the incidents of September 11th, nor to talk about the response of the western world. But it is a time to talk about how we should act towards our friends and neighbours whose ethnicity, culture or history is different from ours.

Because today, with this hideous nightmare happening around us, we all have to show greater understanding and open-mindedness to our neighbours than ever before.

This exhibition, "***Courage to Care***", aims to promote understanding and harmony among all races and cultures, refutes myths about the Jewish people, bring home the

reality of the Holocaust and draw attention to the heroism of "Righteous". It urges personal responsibility - that one must speak up against racial discrimination and injustice whenever and wherever it occurs.

This exhibition is a small tribute to the heroic individuals who risked their own lives during the Holocaust to help save Jews from the Nazi genocide. Ordinary people who took it upon themselves to demonstrate humaneness, fairness and compassion to people who were being hunted and destroyed by the regime in power in their own country.

At great risk to themselves and their family, they provided a hiding place, food and shelter sometimes for years, to people whom they had often not previously known or even met. The exhibition honours those courageous individuals and the people they saved, many of whom now live in Australia. Their "**Courage to Care**" for those not in a position to care for themselves, and with the ever - present threat of execution should they be discovered, has surely earned them the right to the title of "Righteous Among the Nations". Their actions saved lives and ensured that some human decency remained in those dark and brutal times of WWII.

"Courage to Care" draws its inspiration from the Deeds of Valour from "The Righteous Among the Nations", those rare individuals who dared to shelter Jews from the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust.

The "Righteous among the Nations" program was established at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem 1953 to honour those men and women who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save the lives of Jews. To date, over 16,000 individuals have been recognised by Yad Vashem as "Righteous among the Nations", representing over 7,500 authenticated rescue stories.

In Australia, there are known to be 24 people who have been recognised as Righteous. Some have passed away, many are in poor health. In addition, there are many Holocaust survivors in Australia who themselves were rescued by one of the Righteous. The stories of these people represent one of the most powerful messages imaginable of the importance of standing up against oppression and injustice.

But what happens if we don't? What happens if we take the easy route and join in with the mob and participate in the suspicions towards those who are different.

Well, perhaps I can finish with the words of Pastor Martin Niemoller, the leader of the Church's opposition to Hitler during the Second World War. Pastor Niemoller was interned in Nazi concentration camps from 1938 to 1945. His statement is contained within this exhibition, and stands as perhaps the most clear-cut expression of why none of us can close our eyes to intolerance.

He said, "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no- one left to speak out for me".