

KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT OFFICIAL OPENING OF 'COURAGE TO CARE' EXHIBITION HELD AT MANNING REGIONAL ART GALLERY, TAREE DELIVERED BY EVELYN SCOTT, CHAIRPERSON, COUNCIL FOR ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION

11am Wednesday 3rd May 2000

Allan Gold, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be a part of this important occasion for Taree and the Manning River region.

This is not the first time that B'nai B'rith has seen fit to link its own work with the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community.

The organisation, and I think Australian Jewry generally, have been strong supporters of reconciliation.

They've been keenly aware of the core issues that make reconciliation a necessary part of Australia's development as a civilised nation. They've also recognised that there are certain ideas that are common to the goals of both B'nai B'rith and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

One such idea is that racism, in all its forms, must be confronted and defeated. Another such idea is that in order to eliminate racism in the future, we must know about, and come to terms with, its effects on our past and present.

This exhibition, *Courage to Care*, takes us forward on both those paths, and therefore, as Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, I welcome it warmly. Here is an exhibition that both inspires and informs those who will see it. The heroism of the 'Righteous Among Nations' bring home to all of us the deepest positive potential of the human spirit.

At the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation we see our job of promoting knowledge and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as a key part of our mission. We've tackled it in a number of ways.

One very effective method has been the creation and support of the People's Movement for Reconciliation. This has allowed ordinary people in hundreds of communities around Australia to come together, share their stories, and learn to understand and respect each other's cultures and values.

We've had strong support from many of Australia's local government authorities, and a variety of formal agreements between councils representing the wider community, and local Indigenous bodies are now in place. The agreements typically promote awareness and understanding of local Indigenous culture, offer protection for sacred sites and meeting places, and provide guidelines for tackling specific local problem areas. They're doing their bit to eliminate the dangers that ignorance can create.

We've also encouraged the formation of partnerships between Indigenous groups and the institutional parts of our society, ranging from health, education and housing sectors to major employer and community sector peaks and individual companies in key industries such as mining.

These partnerships are building cross-cultural awareness and trust, as well as creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to take greater control of their economic and social futures.

Lastly, and very importantly for the longer-term health of this nation, we've strongly encouraged reforms in our formal education sector.

Now, at long last, the teaching of Australian history in our schools is beginning to include Indigenous perspectives, including the many thousands of years of cultural development before 1788 as well as a more balanced appreciation of our shared history since that year.

The full efforts of these reforms are yet to be felt. But every major school system in Australia has made a commitment to pursue the goal of a properly balanced history curriculum. As the resources improve and teacher expertise expands, these reforms will, I believe, make a major contribution to genuine reconciliation. They'll ultimately have a profound positive impact on Australia's identity as a nation.

I like to think that initiatives like 'Courage to Care' are travelling the same path.

By spreading information and inspiration, you are dispelling the ignorance in which prejudice and hatred can breed so easily.

You are challenging the complacency that so often goes with ignorance and prejudice. You are making a serious contribution to the creation of a more aware and thoughtful Australian society.

It therefore gives me much pleasure, as Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, to declare this exhibition open and commend it most warmly to the people of the Manning River region.

Dr Evelyn Scott, Chairperson, Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation