

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY HER EXCELLENCY, PROF. MARIE BASHIR, AC CVO,
GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES, ON THE LAUNCH OF THE NOVEL, *A
KINCHELA BOY*, BY CHRISTOPHER BEVAN, ON THURSDAY, 4 NOVEMBER
2010 IN SYDNEY IN THE PRESENCE OF SIR GERARD BRENNAN, AC KBE QC,
AND CECIL BOWDEN, A KINCHELA BOYS' HOME SURVIVOR AND ONE OF
THE KINCHELA BOYS ON WHOM THE NOVEL IS BASED**

Thank you Sylvana for that warm introduction.

Let me say that it is a joy, a really moving experience to be with you all today, to be here in the presence of so many special people, Chris Bevan, the author and, of course, someone we all know too well someone who experienced at close hand the suffering of so many of our indigenous sisters and brothers while working for the Aboriginal Legal Service, Sir Gerard Brennan, Uncle Cec Bowden – it is always a privilege to be with him – Pastor Ray Minniecon, Mrs Gabi Hollows, for whom I have a great regard, Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, with whom I have worked on Aboriginal health for many years, and so many, many distinguished guests and friends.

It is a privilege to launch this book and to say that it was, in many instances, a great deal of pain as well as inspiration to read the story of a boy removed, as so many were, so many. This is a blot on Australia's history: taken away to Kinchela.

But the book speaks of others who were taken too, from loving families, and then endured over a lifetime the most horrendous experiences: wrongly-accused, imprisoned, and certainly having to face the most horrendous of experiences: rape, bashings and continual humiliation. If we read about this in a short newspaper report as happening in another country we would be outraged. Yet we are talking about the oldest living civilisation on earth whose family meant all to them.

I have been in the privileged position to have been called to give testimony before the National Enquiry into the Removal of Children from their Families and that was distressing. I was also sent reports to review for Aboriginal deaths in custody.

So I am extremely sensitive to the issues that arise, page after page, in this book that speak about so much suffering amongst many, many individuals, to say nothing of the agony of their families.

I don't think that Uncle Cec Bowden minds me sharing with you something he told me today with Pastor Ray Minniecon. It was only last Saturday that he, Cec, a Kinchela Boy, met his sister for the first time since they were removed.

So these experiences are very graphic indeed. This is an eloquent book, which is difficult to read to begin with. The comment has been made that it has been written so eloquently but in the language in which it has been conveyed to Chris by so many of the men, young and old, whom he encountered in his days of service and commitment, in an attempt to write, and to correct horrendous injustices.

It indelibly makes an impact on one's heart when one reads the thoughts and the feelings in the language in which they were expressed: that form of English which is so eloquent.

I hope that this book has the widest possible coverage amongst universities and technical colleges everywhere.

It is certainly something that should strike the hearts of all who read it, to say: "Never again, never ever again should this disgrace happen."

I say, as a sentimentalist, that I am grateful to have lived so long to see some changes happening in our society now. It is because of courageous people like Chris and Father Frank Brennan, whose father is here with us today, and many others who have worked at the coalface, who have learnt and then taught us.

Perhaps Aboriginal people have taught me more than anything I learnt at university. They have humanity and love of families and, above all, incredible resilience, and that shines through too in this book – their resilience, their nobility.

But it is certainly a very, very important and significant book in our gradual awareness during our emergence from years and years of ignorance. That is the other terrible thought that comes to remind us of, just how ignorant the population has been in their lack of understanding, not only of humanity, but of the great richness of the first Australians and their capacity to forgive and to go on sharing this great culture of theirs with us.

So Chris, you have done us a very, very great service by recording this. I know that it has arisen from your wealth of experience working for the Aboriginal Legal Service.

I must say I felt very proud, shortly after, not about being appointed Governor, that's separate, but I received a congratulatory letter from a barrister who said: "I doubt whether anyone other than the first few Governors would have had more contact with Aboriginal people who were suffering," and exposed to the same view as you, Chris.

I think that was perhaps an exaggeration. But it certainly is very much a part of my life and my psyche, having had the privilege of growing up in Wirradjuri country and having been nurtured by many of the Wirradjuri people.

This book strikes home very much to my psyche and I hope it will to all who read it.

So it is with a great sense of privilege and honour that I have been asked to launch this book. Thank you, Chris, above all, for the courage, the courage that it has taken, as well as the long hours and the sheer sensitivity and hard work that has put it together.

So, Chris, it is with a sense of privilege I launch this book, *A Kinchela Boy*.

Thank you.