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MEDIA RELEASE

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‘Apology holds a promise for children today and a path to social inclusion’

Muriel Bamblett, AM, Chairperson of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), said today, “On the national apology to be delivered tomorrow, first and foremost I want to acknowledge the resilience and strength of the Stolen Generations, their families and communities. Without them telling their stories and struggling through the pain of separation there would be no apology and no opportunity to make a fresh start in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.”

Ms Bamblett said, “the apology will bring mixed emotions as we pause to remember the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away and will not be physically with us to hear the apology. We remember those we have lost. Those who bravely told their stories – stories that drove the formation of SNAICC and prompted SNAICC in 1991 to call for a national inquiry into the Stolen Generations, a call that in time led to the 1995 HREOC Inquiry.”

She said, “tomorrow’s apology means that the past wrongs do mean something to the Australian people, and acknowledges that we as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were wronged. It acknowledges not only those who were taken but those left behind: our old grandmothers and mothers hiding their children and not feeling safe in their own country, being too frightened to ask for help as it only led to one solution – ‘to take children away’.”

She said, “To me the apology is the right thing. It will acknowledge that to forcibly remove and permanently separate a child from their family is harsh and cruel. Most of the children removed were swept into a life of poverty and hardship. They had their innocence, their childhood and their culture stolen from them.”

She added, “The removal policies were based on the racist premise that Australia was better off without its Indigenous peoples and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were better off without their families and culture. This is the shameful truth that the apology will acknowledge.”

“The apology will be a major step forward in the journey of healing for members of the Stolen Generations and their families. For all non-Indigenous Australians it will provide an opportunity to start to live with honour alongside their Indigenous brothers and sisters,” Ms Bamblett said.

She added, “SNAICC congratulates Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin for the respectful manner in which they have brought forward the apology as the first order of business for the new the federal parliament. Past injustices laid the foundations of the poverty, social exclusion and poor health that so many Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people experience today. The burden of this legacy cannot be left to the Stolen Generations and their families. The whole nation must focus on returning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to their rightful place amongst the healthiest and strongest kids in the land.”

Ms Bamblett said, “We are confident that the Prime Minister will see this as a new beginning and not the end. The 54 recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report, including reparations for the Stolen Generations, provide a blueprint for reform that the government must follow. The government’s commitment to Social Inclusion must create a future of hope, safety, equality of opportunity, health and wellbeing for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that embraces, rather than forsakes, their cultural identity and pride. This is the promise that the apology holds for children of today.”

SNAICC, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, the national non-government peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, first called for a national inquiry into the Stolen Generations in 1991.

Ms Bamblett will be in Canberra as an invited guest of the federal government to witness the National Apology from the public gallery of Parliament. She is available for media comment.

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