

## **APOLOGY TO THOSE AFFECTED BY PAST FORCED ADOPTION PRACTICES**

**Greens Minister for Human Services, Cassy O'Connor MP**

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*(Please check against delivery)*

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Mr Speaker, distinguished guests, we stand here today with heavy hearts and joined in sorrow surrounded in this place by the women and adult children who suffered a wrong so terrible and unimaginably cruel that in hearing and reading their testimony we can only begin to understand the depth of their grief and the enormity of their suffering.

The policy of forced adoption broke the hearts of a generation and more of young mothers who had their children ripped away from them, who never saw the faces of their babies and who searched for those faces for the rest of their lives.

They were young women whose only crime was to fall pregnant and who were made to pay for that mistake over and over again for the rest of their lives.

These women were treated like dirt and sometimes treated like slaves by the state- and church-run institutions they were forced into, either by their parents or the harsh value system of their times. They were spoken to as if they deserved every insult, privation and abuse of their fundamental human rights they received. They were told they did not deserve to keep their babies and that if they loved them they would give them away.

They gave birth, sometimes without pain medication, which was withheld as punishment for their sins, with sheets or pillows covering their faces so they could not see the miracle of their baby's birth.

They could not hold their babies, could not name them, and could not begin to hope they would be given a chance to love and nurture the child they had given birth to.

These women were not treated with a scrap of respect, with no compassion, and this by state, charitable and church-run institutions where true charity was in short supply. These charitable and religious institutions, bastions of morality, were engaged in practices that we now know to be illegal and immoral.

Some have formally apologised, some have not, and for those who have not, it is well past time they did.

These young Tasmanian women were made to feel the deepest shame for falling pregnant outside wedlock, and for that it is we who are ashamed and it is we who say sorry for the agonising hurt these blameless Tasmanian women were made to suffer.

To your children, forcibly taken, stolen and traded away like a commodity, we say sorry.

We are sorry that so many of you, from the moment of your birth, were not given a second of the warmth, love and tenderness your mothers had to offer.

We are sorry that the first arms you were nestled in were those of a stranger employed in one of the Salvation Army, Catholic, Church of England or state-run institutions where you came into the world, a stranger who likely felt no love for you at all. You deserved that love; it was denied, and many of you will have been searching for it all your lives.

We are sorry that many of you will have felt anger towards your mother, blaming her for the enduring, aching sense of rejection that you have suffered; and the anger, too, towards your fathers. You could not have known that you, your mothers and your fathers were all victims of a harsh, judgmental, vindictive practice that spanned the best part of seven decades in Tasmania.

You were all victims, and for that today the Parliament of Tasmania, on behalf of the Tasmanian people, says sorry, and that while we cannot change the past, while we cannot restore the brokenness or your lives, we can say it will never happen again. Small comfort for some, I know, but that pledge must be made.

Not far from where I live in West Hobart is a building that even today speaks of utter misery. The Elim Maternity Hospital, as it was known then, was run by the Salvation Army and it still reeks with sadness. It is a permanent reminder of a long, dark, unhappy chapter in Tasmania's history. Of course for the women whose lives were irrevocably damaged within its walls, and with all those institutions involved in the illegal and immoral forced removal of children, that chapter is without end.

To the mothers, children, the fathers robbed and wronged, we say sorry, and we hope with every fibre of our being that today's apology and recognition of the wrongs inflicted on you bring a measure of relief and of healing.

We are so very, very sorry for your lifelong loss and your pain, and let it be known and placed on the permanent public record that you did no wrong at all.

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