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## *TRANSCRIPT*

**PRIME MINISTER:** Mr Speaker, let me first welcome all those who have come here today.

Whether you sit here in this Chamber, the Great Hall, outside elsewhere in the nation's capital. Your living room. In your bed, unable to rise today or speak to another soul. Your journey to where you are today has been a long and painful one, and we acknowledge that and we welcome you today wherever you are.

Mr Speaker, silenced voices. Muffled cries in the darkness.

Unacknowledged tears. The tyranny of invisible suffering.

The never heard pleas of tortured souls bewildered by an indifference to the unthinkable theft of their innocence.

Today, Australia confronts a trauma – an abomination – hiding in plain sight for far too long.

Today, we confront a question too horrible to ask, let alone answer.

Why weren't the children of our nation loved, nurtured and protected?

Why was their trust betrayed?

Why did those who know cover it up?

Why were the cries of children and parents ignored?

Why was our system of justice blind to injustice?

Why has it taken so long to act?

Why were other things more important than this, the care of innocent children?

Why didn't we believe?

Today we dare to ask these questions, and finally acknowledge and confront the lost screams of our children.

While we can't be so vain to pretend to answers, we must be so humble to fall before those who were forsaken and beg to them our apology.

A sorry that dare not ask for forgiveness.

A sorry that dare not try and make sense of the incomprehensible or think it could.

A sorry that does not insult with an incredible promise.

A sorry that speaks only of profound grief and loss.

A sorry from a nation that seeks to reach out in compassion into the darkness where you have lived for so long.

Nothing we can do now will right the wrongs inflicted on our nation's children.

Even after a comprehensive Royal Commission, which finally enabled the voices to be heard and the silence to be broken, we will all continue to struggle.

So today we gather in this Chamber in humility. Not just as Representatives of the people of this country, but as fathers, as mothers, as siblings, friends, workmates, and in some cases, indeed as victims and survivors.

Ngunnawal means 'meeting place'. And on this day of apology, we meet together.

We honour every survivor in this country, we love you, we hear you and we honour you.

No matter if you are here at this meeting place or elsewhere, this apology is to you and for you.

Your presence and participation makes tangible our work today – and it gives strength to others who are yet to share what has happened in their world.

Elsewhere in this building and around Australia, there are others who are silently watching and listening to these proceedings, men and women who have never told a soul what has happened to them. To these men and women I say this apology is for you too.

And later when the speeches are over, we will stand in silence and remember the victims who are not with us anymore, many too sadly by their own hand.

As a nation, we failed them, we forsook them. That will always be our shame.

This apology is for them and their families too.

As one survivor recently said to me, "It wasn't a foreign enemy who did this to us – this was done by Australians." To Australians. Enemies in our midst.

Enemies. In. Our. Midst.

The enemies of innocence.

Look up at the galleries, look at the Great Hall, look outside this place and you will see men and women from every walk of life, from every generation, and every part of our land.

Crushed, abused, discarded and forgotten.

The crimes of ritual sexual abuse happened in schools, churches, youth groups, scout troops, orphanages, foster homes, sporting clubs, group homes, charities, and in family homes as well.

It happened anywhere a predator thought they could get away with it, and the systems within these organisations allowed it to happen and turned a blind eye.

It happened day after day, week after week, month after month, and decade after decade. Unrelenting torment.

When a child spoke up, they weren't believed and the crimes continued with impunity.

One survivor told me that when he told a teacher of his abuse, that teacher then became his next abuser.

Trust broken.

Innocence betrayed.

Power and position exploited for evil dark crimes.

A survivor named Faye told the Royal Commission, "Nothing takes the memories away. It happened 53 years ago and it's still affecting me."

One survivor named Ann said, "My mother believed them rather than me".

I also met with a mother whose two daughters were abused by a priest the family trusted. Suicide would claim one of her two beautiful girls and the other lives under the crushing weight of what was done to her.

As a father of two daughters, I can't comprehend the magnitude of what she has faced.

Not just as a father but as Prime Minister, I am angry too at the calculating destruction of lives and abuse of trust, including those who have abused the shield of faith and religion to hide their crimes, a shield that is supposed to protect the innocent, not the guilty. And they stand condemned.

One survivor says it was like "becoming a stranger to your parents."

Mental health illnesses, self-harm, and addictions followed.

The pain didn't stop with adulthood.

Relationships with partners and children became strained as survivors struggled with the conflicting currents within them.

Parents and siblings felt guilt and sadness for what they had missed, for what and whom they chose to believe, and for what they did not see.

While survivors contemplated what could have been.

A survivor named Rodney asks the question so common to so many survivors, he wonders about “the person I may have become, or the person I could have become if I didn’t have all of this in my life.”

Death can take many forms. In this case the loss of a life never lived, a life denied.

Another survivor, Aiden spoke of not getting justice because his abuser had died. He said, “I was bereft because I was robbed. I was robbed of my day in court. I wanted to tell the world what he did. That was stolen. That was him again, taking control.”

Mr Speaker, today, as a nation, we confront our failure to listen, to believe and to provide justice.

And again today, we say sorry.

To the children we failed, sorry.

To the parents whose trust was betrayed and who have struggled to pick up the pieces, sorry.

To the whistle-blowers who we did not listen to, sorry.

To the spouses, partners, wives, husbands and children who have dealt with the consequences of the abuse, cover-ups and obstruction, sorry.

To generations past and present, sorry.

Mr Speaker, as part of our work leading us to this day, I recently met with the National Apology Survivor’s Reference Group, as did the Leader of the Opposition, who are with us here today.

I want to thank this wonderful group of people and brave people.

Many are survivors; they have all worked so hard to make today a reality.

They said to me that an apology without action is just a piece of paper and it is. And today they also wanted to hear about our actions.

It is a fair call.

In outlining our actions, I want to recognise the work of my predecessors, former Prime Minister Gillard, who is with us here today, and I thank you for your attendance. Former Prime Minister Rudd, the Member for Warringah, who continues to serve us here in this place, and the former Prime Minister, Mr Turnbull. I want to thank them for their compassion and leadership as they also confronted these terrible failings.

The foundations of our actions are the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission, initiated by Prime Minister Gillard.

The steady compassionate hand of the Commissioners and staff resulted in 17,000 survivors coming forward and nearly 8,000 of them recounting their abuse in private sessions of the Commission.

We are all grateful to the survivors who gave evidence to the Commission. It is because of your strength and your courage that we are gathered here today.

Many of the Commissioners and staff are also with us today and I thank them also.

Mr Speaker, acting on the recommendations of the Royal Commission with concrete action gives practical meaning to today's Apology.

The Commonwealth, as our national Government, must lead and coordinate our response.

The National Redress Scheme has commenced.

I thank the State and Territory Governments for their backing of the scheme.

The Scheme is about recognising and alleviating the impact of past abuse, and providing justice for survivors.

The Scheme will provide survivors with access to counselling and psychological services, monetary payments, and, for those who want one – and I stress for those who want one – a direct personal response from an institution where the abuse occurred.

It will mean – that after many years, often decades, of denials and cover-ups — the institutions responsible for ruining lives admit their wrongdoing and the terrible damage they caused.

The National Office of Child Safety is another big step forward to ensuring the prevention and detection of child abuse, wherever it occurs.

It was announced as part of our Government's response to the Royal Commission and was established from July 1 of this year within the Department of Social Services.

As Prime Minister, I will be changing these arrangements to ensure that the National Office of Child Safety will report to me. It will reside within the portfolio of Prime Minister and Cabinet, as it should. The Minister for Social Services will assist me in this role, including reporting to me on the progress of Royal Commission recommendations and the activities of the Office of Child Safety.

The Office has already begun its work to raise awareness of child safety and to drive cultural change in institutions in the community – to ensure that the systemic failures and abuses of power that brought us here today are not repeated.

Importantly, children themselves are being empowered to participate in these initiatives – because our children must be heard, and when it comes to the work of safety, it must be

approachable and child friendly. They must know who they can tell, and they must be believed, and they must know where they can go.

All Australian Governments are now working together to establish a national database, to ensure higher standards for working with children and that data about people's ability to work with children is shared nationally.

And our work does not stop at our borders.

We are ensuring children across the world are protected by stopping child sex offenders from travelling overseas without permission, which will disrupt, prevent and investigate the abuse of children globally.

And we recognise that as survivors age, those who were abused in or by an institution, have real fears about entering into aged care facilities.

It's an understandable fear given what happened during childhood, and we will work with survivor groups about what we can do alleviate those fears and indeed the work of the Royal Commission into aged care will be able to address this as well.

And to assist with lasting change we recognise that there are many more survivors who were abused in other settings such as their own homes and in their communities, who will not be covered by this redress scheme.

These survivors also need to be heard, and believed, and responded to with services to address their needs. So today, I commit to fund the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence, and I call on the states and territories to work as partners in this venture. This Centre will be the place to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, to deal with the stigma, to support help seeking and guide best practice for training and other services.

All of this is just the start.

The Australian Government has not rejected a single recommendation of the Royal Commission.

We are now actively working on 104 of the 122 recommendations that were addressed to the Commonwealth. The 18 remaining are being closely examined, in consultation with states and territories.

Today we commit that from December this year, we will report back to the Australian people, through the Parliament, to be held accountable each year, each year, on the progress we are making on the recommendations over the next five years and then beyond.

We will shine a spotlight on all parts of government to ensure we are held accountable.

And the institutions which perpetrated this abuse, covered it up and refused to be held accountable, must be kept on the hook.

Already, many of those organisations have made their own apologies and have signed up to be a part of the National Redress Scheme, as they should.

But there are others yet to join, and today I simply say that justice, decency and the beliefs and values we share as Australians, insists that they sign on.

Today I also commit to establishing a National Museum, a place of truth and commemoration, to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse.

We will work with survivor groups, to ensure your stories are recorded, that your truth is told, that our nation does not turn from our shame, and that our Nation will never forget the untold horrors you experienced.

Through this we will endeavour to bring some healing to our nation and to learn from our past horrors.

We can never promise a world where there are no abusers. But we can promise a country where we commit to hear and believe our children.

To work together to keep children safe, to trust them and most of all respect their innocence.

Mr Speaker, I present the formal apology to be tabled in this Parliament today, which will be handed to those in the Great Hall shortly. It reflects all of the sentiments that I have expressed on behalf of the Australian people, this Parliament and our Government.

And as I table that and, as I do, I simply say: I believe you. We believe you. Your country believes you.

Source: <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/national-apology-address>