

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS
AT THE 2ND NATIONAL PUBLIC EDUCATION FORUM**

**PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA
Saturday 27th March 2010**

**HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR MARIE BASHIR AC CVO
GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

**MR PETER GARRIGAN, *President, Australian Council of State Schools
Organisation***

**MR NORM HART, *President, Australian Government Primary Principals
Association***

**MS SHEREE VERTIGAN, *President, Australian Secondary Principals
Association***

**MR ROB NAIRN, *Deputy President, Australian Secondary Principals
Association***

MR ANGELO GAVRIELATOS, *Federal President, Australian Education Union*

**SCHOOL EDUCATION DIRECTORS, PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS,
PARENTS, MANY DISTINGUISHED GUESTS AND COLLEAGUES**

**IT IS INDEED A PLEASURE TO JOIN COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS TODAY
FROM ACROSS OUR NATION FOR THIS MOST IMPORTANT FORUM — A
FORUM TO CONSIDER OUR COMMITMENT, THE QUALITY AND FUTURE OF
THAT COMMITMENT TO OUR NATION'S RICHEST AND MOST
IRREPLACEABLE RESOURCE — THE CHILDREN OF AUSTRALIA AND
THEIR EDUCATION.**

**OUR EXPECTATION IS THAT POSITIVE DELIBERATIONS FROM THIS
FORUM WILL BUILD UPON THE INITIATIVES AND CREATIVE IDEAS
GENERATED FROM LAST YEAR'S FORUM (CONVENED BY THE DEPUTY
PRIME MINISTER THE HON JULIA GILLARD), AND THAT THESE
DELIBERATIONS WILL BE INFLUENTIAL IN POLICY AND ACTION TO
STRENGTHEN AND ENHANCE PUBLIC EDUCATION ACROSS AUSTRALIA
TODAY.**

BUT MAY I AT THIS POINT RECORD MY RESPECT FOR THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THIS LAND UPON WHICH WE GATHER, — THEIR ANCESTORS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS, — INDEED FOR ALL ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS WHO HAVE NURTURED THIS GREAT CONTINENT FOR TENS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION IS INDEED A BASIC RIGHT, AND AS THE FORUM THEME SO ELOQUENTLY DECLARES, *EVERY FAMILY DESERVES THE CHOICE OF AN EXCELLENT PUBLIC SCHOOL.*

INDEED, THOSE LEADERS OF OUR PAST WHOSE CONTRIBUTION SET THE FLEDGLING COLONY OF THE 19TH CENTURY ON A COURSE TOWARDS NATIONHOOD AND PROSPERITY WERE UNFLINCHINGLY STRONG ADVOCATES FOR SUCH A RIGHT TO PUBLIC EDUCATION.

IMMEDIATELY TWO MEN COME TO MIND, TWO TITANS MAY I CLAIM, IN AUSTRALIA'S HISTORY. LACHLAN MACQUARIE, 5TH GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES WHOSE BICENTENARY OF APPOINTMENT WE CELEBRATE THIS YEAR; AND SIR HENRY PARKES, FIVE TIMES PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES, WHO IS WELL REMEMBERED AS THE ELOQUENT ADVOCATE FOR FEDERATION — "*ONE PEOPLE, ONE DESTINY*" WAS HIS EXHORTATION TO ALL.

SO TODAY, WE PAUSE BRIEFLY TO REFLECT ON THEIR GREAT LEGACY OF EDUCATION, PARTICULARLY PUBLIC EDUCATION IN COLONIAL NEW SOUTH WALES IN AUSTRALIA, AND ALSO TO CONSIDER THE WAY AHEAD.

DESPITE THE UNCERTAINTY AND THE ENDLESS CHALLENGES FACING THE FIRST SETTLEMENT COMMUNITY IN 1788, — A SCHOOL — THE FIRST IN THE COLONY WAS ESTABLISHED THE FOLLOWING YEAR. AND ACROSS THE FIRST DECADE OF SETTLEMENT, A HANDFUL OF SMALL SCHOOLS BEGAN TO APPEAR.

WITH THE APPOINTMENT OF LACHLAN MACQUARIE IN 1810, THE VALUE OF EDUCATION AND THE NEEDS OF THE YOUNG, BEGAN TO RECEIVE EVER-INCREASING PROMINENCE. AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

NOW BEGAN TO BE EXTENDED BEYOND THE EXCLUSIVE DOMAIN OF THE MORE PROSPEROUS MIDDLE CLASS.

NOT ONLY DID MACQUARIE ESTABLISH A SCHOOL FOR ORPHANS (WHOSE ORIGINAL BUILDING AT RYDALMERE STANDS INTACT TODAY FOLLOWING FINE RESTORATION), HE PROPOSED A SCHOOL AT PARRAMATTA FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN, AND IN 1820 LAID THE FOUNDATION STONE FOR 'THE SCHOOL FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN OF THE POOR' AT HYDE PARK.

AS EARLY AS 1834 (JUST 46 YEARS AFTER SETTLEMENT HAD BEGUN), THE "NORMAL INSTITUTION" WAS ESTABLISHED TO TRAIN TEACHERS FOR A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION FOR WHICH GOVERNOR RICHARD BOURKE, THE 8TH GOVERNOR, WAS A STRONG ADVOCATE.

CERTAINLY THE NEED FOR TEACHERS WAS CONSIDERABLE — AND I WOULD ADD — REMAINS SO TODAY.

THE NEW SOUTH WALES CENSUS OF 1846 REVEALED A EUROPEAN POPULATION OF ALMOST 190,000 (189,609) OF WHOM ALMOST 26,000 (25,781) OVER THE AGE OF THIRTEEN YEARS WERE UNABLE TO READ OR WRITE. THE LIMITED ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR THOSE UNDER THIRTEEN YEARS WAS ALSO STILL CONSIDERABLE, AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION WERE BEING REFLECTED BEFORE LONG, IN BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU A NEWSPAPER ACCOUNT WHICH APPEARED ON DECEMBER 1ST 1883, PROVIDING A GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THOSE BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS — A SOMEWHAT JUDGEMENTAL DESCRIPTION BUT ONE WHICH MAY SOUND SURPRISINGLY FAMILIAR TODAY. AND I QUOTE — *"YOU CAN SEE THEM ON EVERY STREET CORNER, IN THE BILLIARD HALLS AND PUBS AND ON THE FRINGES OF RACE TRACKS AND FOOTBALL CROWDS. THEY HANG FROM TRAMS, LEAN ON LAMP POSTS, SHOUT TO EACH OTHER, MOCK THE POLICE, MAKE LEWD REMARKS AND FIGHT AND SCUFFLE WITH*

EACH OTHER CONTINUOUSLY. THEY ARE THE LARRIKINS — THE TOUGH, MISCHIEVOUS, ROWDY BOYS OF THE STREET, — AND THEY ARE BEGINNING TO BE NOTED WITH SERIOUS CONCERN BY MAGISTRATES, POLICE, CLERGYMEN AND POLITICIANS OF AUSTRALIAN CITIES.

THEY FORM MOBS AND LIKE TO INDULGE IN A LITTLE GANG WARFARE WHEN THEY ARE NOT THIEVING, VANDALISING OR CAUSING OTHER MISCHIEF.”

THE PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITIES MUST HAVE ALREADY BEEN PLANNING TO ADDRESS THE OBVIOUS WIDESPREAD NEED, BECAUSE JUST A FEW WEEKS EARLIER, BEFORE THE PUBLICATION OF THAT NEWSPAPER COMMENTARY, THE NEW SOUTH WALES BOARD OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION WAS ESTABLISHED, AND SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL OPENED!

THIS WAS THE ERA OF SIR HENRY PARKES, WHO, WELL IN ADVANCE OF HIS TIME, POSSESSED CONSIDERABLE INSIGHT INTO THAT SPECIAL EMPOWERMENT WHICH ONLY EDUCATION CONFERS.

INDEED, HE PLACED THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE ON UNIVERSAL PUBLIC EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY REGARDLESS OF SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC STATUS OR GENDER. THIS ATTITUDE HAD ARISEN FROM HIS OWN EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION WITHIN A HUMBLE FAMILY IN STONELEIGH-BY-COVENTRY, IN ENGLAND.

SIR HENRY’S POWERFUL ADVOCACY OF EDUCATION ALSO FOR WOMEN WAS STRENGTHENED BY THE FACT THAT HE HAD ACTUALLY VISITED THE RENOWNED AMERICAN COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, VASSAR, DURING A TRIP TO THE USA. AND IN THE NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE REGARDING THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN, HE HAD CONFIDENTLY ASSERTED, — *“WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM EVERY TALENT THEY POSSESS BEING RIPENED TO ITS FULLEST POWER.”*

RESEARCH INDICATES THAT ONE OF THE DRIVING FORCES OF AUSTRALIAN PROSPERITY OVER THE LAST FEW DECADES HAS BEEN THE HUGE IMPROVEMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF YOUNG

AUSTRALIANS, PARTICULARLY YOUNG WOMEN. AND A CONSIDERABLE CONTRIBUTION IN THIS REGARD HAS DERIVED FROM THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM.

THIS MODEL MUST NEVER BE DIMINISHED, AND I CONSIDER THAT IT IS THE OBLIGATION OF EVERY AUSTRALIAN, PARTICULARLY THOSE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE FUNDING AND PROVISION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, TO DEFEND THIS FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT WITHIN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY, AND STRIVE TO ENSURE THAT IT CONTINUES TO COME WITH THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE QUALITY.

AS SOME OF YOU MAY KNOW, I WAS EDUCATED BY CHOICE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS. AND IT IS BECAUSE OF MY PROFOUNDLY RICH EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES ACROSS THOSE YEARS, THAT I HAVE SUCH FAITH IN AND RESPECT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION.

I BEGAN MY SCHOOLING AT A SMALL BUT BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY SCHOOL IN THE RIVERINA — AT NARRANDERA PUBLIC SCHOOL, AND LATER I ATTENDED SYDNEY GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL, WHERE MY MOTHER BEFORE ME HAD BEEN A STUDENT. FROM HER EXPERIENCE, I WAS ALREADY AWARE OF THE GREAT SCHOLASTIC REPUTATION OF THE HIGH SCHOOL OF MY CHOICE.

AND, LIKE MYSELF, EVERY AUSTRALIAN CHILD SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION REGARDLESS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OR DISTANCE FROM URBAN CENTRES, OR ETHNOCULTURAL MIX.

QUALITY EDUCATION SHOULD INCLUDE PROVISION FOR ADEQUATE ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND, WHERE INDICATED, APPROPRIATE INTERVENTION SENSITIVELY PROVIDED TO RECTIFY THIS.

WE SHOULD HAVE STRUCTURES WHEREBY THE CHILD WHO IS VULNERABLE TO DEPRESSION OR TO OTHER MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES CAN, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND SKILLED PROFESSIONALS, HAVE ACCESS TO STRATEGIES WHICH PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING RESILIENCY.

I AM AWARE OF SOME EXCELLENT PILOT PROGRAMS OF THIS NATURE ALREADY UNDERWAY, DERIVING FROM SUCCESSFUL EVIDENCE-BASED STUDIES.

SUCH AN INVESTMENT ON OUR PARTS WILL SURELY PRODUCE AN OUTCOME SUPERIOR IN BOTH ECONOMIC AS WELL AS HUMANITARIAN TERMS, THAN THE ALTERNATIVE WHICH RELEGATES FAR TOO MANY OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TOWARDS AN IDENTITY OF FAILURE AND FRUSTRATION, BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS, DELINQUENCY, EMPLOYMENT DIFFICULTIES, AND SOME (FAR TOO MANY IN A SOCIETY SUCH AS OURS) TO JUVENILE AND ADULT JUSTICE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES. NO-ONE CAN DISPUTE THE CRITICAL NEED FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INDEED QUALITY REMEDIAL EDUCATION, FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN JUVENILE JUSTICE FACILITIES, GIVEN THE CORRELATION OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES WITHIN THE POPULATION OF YOUNG OFFENDERS.

AS GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES, I AM PRIVILEGED TO VISIT MANY NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOLS AND SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH COUNTLESS STUDENTS FROM KINDERGARTEN TO YEAR 12, AS WELL AS WITH THE MANY DEDICATED AND INSPIRING TEACHERS WHO CONTINUE TO PLAY SUCH A VITAL ROLE IN BUILDING AUSTRALIA'S CIVIL SOCIETY.

AND WE CAN NEVER FORGET THE PRICELESS ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF PARENTS, AND THE PARENTS AND FRIENDS ORGANISATIONS WORKING IN DYNAMIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCHOOL.

ACCESSIBILITY OF PARENTS TO DIALOGUE WITH THE SCHOOL ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S ABILITY AND PROGRESS IS OF HIGH IMPORTANCE. IN NEW SOUTH WALES, PUBLIC EDUCATION — SCHOOLS AND TAFE INSTITUTES — ASSERTS THAT IT PROVIDES "MORE INFORMATION TO PARENTS, TO THE COMMUNITY AND TAX PAYERS THAN ANY OTHER SYSTEMS AND PROVIDERS".

IT IS HEARTENING TO NOTE THAT IN AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT INDIGENOUS FAMILIES, THE TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE OF THE REGION IS BEING TAUGHT, AND IN SOME SCHOOLS, SUCH LANGUAGE CLASSES ARE

ALSO AVAILABLE TO PARENTS. THIS MODEL IS PROVING TO HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE PROGRESS GENERALLY, OF THE STUDENTS INVOLVED.

IN RECENT YEARS I HAVE VISITED SCHOOLS RIGHT ACROSS THE STATE, MOST RECENTLY TO MENINDEE WHERE 80 – 85% OF THE PUPILS ARE OF INDIGENOUS HERITAGE. THIS IS A THRIVING SCHOOL, LARGELY DRIVEN BY THE HIGH COMMITMENT OF THE PRINCIPAL AND DEDICATED STAFF.

IN SOME SCHOOLS, INCLUDING THIS ONE, A MODEL OF PRESCHOOL KINDERGARTEN CLASSES CO-LOCATED WITH PROGRESSIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, IS INDICATING POSITIVE BENEFITS FOR BOTH THE VERY YOUNG AND THE OLDER STUDENTS.

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, ORGANISED BY THE NEW SOUTH WALES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OFFICERS, HUNDREDS OF YEAR 11 AND YEAR 12 CAPTAINS AND VICE-CAPTAINS FROM HIGH SCHOOLS (GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT) MEET WITH ME AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE (FOLLOWING THEIR MORNING VISIT TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENT). THESE VISITS ESSENTIALLY SERVE TO FAMILIARISE THEM WITH THE DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES OF THEIR SOCIETY AND RELATED ISSUES.

WHETHER FROM THE FARTHEST AREAS OF OUR STATE OR FROM THE CITIES, MOST OF THESE YOUNG AUSTRALIANS SEEM TO SHARE IDEALISTIC ASPIRATIONS FOR A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY, FOR GENUINE RECONCILIATION WITH OUR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS, FOR GREATER CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

MANY EXPRESS THEIR INTEREST IN STUDYING FOR CAREERS IN TEACHING, NURSING, THE DEFENCE SERVICES, AND EVEN IN AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS. THESE GATHERINGS PROVIDE A VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY TO POINT OUT THAT AUSTRALIA HAS A CRITICAL NEED FOR MORE GRADUATES FROM BOTH TAFE AND UNIVERSITIES IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING, TO MEET THE BURGEONING DEMAND ACROSS THE CONSTRUCTION, MINING AND RESOURCES INDUSTRIES, FOOD PRODUCTION, AREAS OF SUSTAINABILITY,

AND MORE. THEY FILL ME WITH OPTIMISM AND JOYFUL AMBITION FOR AUSTRALIA'S CONTINUING INFLUENCE FOR GOOD.

IT IS THEREFORE IMPORTANT THAT WE SUSTAIN AND NURTURE THE IDEALISTIC ENERGY OF OUR YOUNG SCHOLARS, WITH THE BEST OF POSSIBLE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIA (WITH ITS POPULATION OF JUST 22 MILLION), AS A LEADING RESPONSIBLE AND INFLUENTIAL MEMBER OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION — AND INDEED GLOBALLY — CAN ONLY BE ASSURED WITH CONFIDENCE THROUGH UNSWERVING COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC EDUCATION OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY.

THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES FOR THIS HAVE BEEN CLEARLY ENUNCIATED BY THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION IN ITS ADVOCACY THAT GOVERNMENTS “PROPERLY AND ADEQUATELY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS” AND “THAT THE RIGHT OF EVERY FAMILY — EVERY CHILD TO A WELL RESOURCED QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THEIR COMMUNITY WITH QUALIFIED TEACHERS AND STAFF TO MEET THEIR NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS” — THE ASPIRATIONS OF AUSTRALIA.

EDUCATION IS THE GREATEST RIGHT, THE GREATEST GIFT AND THE MOST EMPOWERING ACQUISITION OF ALL. WINSTON CHURCHILL UNDERSTOOD THIS WHEN HE SAID “*THE EMPIRES OF THE FUTURE ARE THE EMPIRES OF THE MIND*”.

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR MOST VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION.