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Australia 'sorry' for child abuse

Australian PM Kevin Rudd has apologised to the hundreds of thousands of people, some British migrants, who were abused or neglected in state care as children.



Kevin Rudd: "A spirit that has stubbornly refused to be beaten"

Mr Rudd said he was "deeply sorry" for the pain caused to the children and their extended families.

He said he hoped the national apology would help to "heal the pain" and be a turning point in Australian history.

Some 500,000 "forgotten Australians" were abused or neglected in orphanages and children's homes from 1930 to 1970.

The Canberra ceremony was attended by hundreds of people forced to migrate to Australia when young, some 7,000 of whom still live in Australia.

Some wept openly and held each other as Mr Rudd shared stories of survivors he had spoken with - children who were beaten with belt buckles or sexually violated.

Kevin Rudd also offered an apology to child migrants taken from the UK to Australia after the war, often without their parents' consent.

On Sunday, the UK government said the British prime minister would apologise for the forced migration policy next year.

'Lost childhoods'

"We are sorry," Mr Rudd told a gathering of 1,000 of the victims at Parliament House.

"Sorry for the tragedy - the absolute tragedy - of childhoods lost."

"Sorry that as children you were taken from your families and placed in institutions where so often you were abused. Sorry for the physical suffering, the emotional starvation and the cold absence of love, of tenderness, of care."

Mr Rudd said the government would work to ensure that such a tragedy would never happen again.

"Let us resolve this day that this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation's story," he said.

"A turning point for governments... to do all in our power to never allow this to happen again."

Mr Rudd said it was important to acknowledge the past in order to be able to move forward as a nation.

"The truth is, this is an ugly story," Mr Rudd told Parliament House. The truth is great evil has been done."

Speaking directly to the gathering, he said: "It is my hope that from today, you will be called the 'remembered Australians'."

Mr Rudd's speech comes after his formal apology last year to the Stolen Generation, Aborigines taken from their parents and sent to state institutions and white families to be brought up under a policy which only ended in the 1960s.

Migrants programme

Under the Child Migrants Programme - which ended just 40 years ago - the UK sent poor children to a "better life" in Australia, Canada and elsewhere.

As they were compulsorily shipped out of Britain, many of the children were told - wrongly - their parents were dead.

Many parents did not know their children, aged

HISTORY OF UK CHILD MIGRANTS

UK the only country with a sustained history of child migration - over four centuries

In 1618, 100 sent from London to Richmond, Virginia

In total 130,000 sent from the UK to Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) and Australia

Post-war, 7,000 shipped to Australia and 1,300 to New Zealand, Rhodesia and Canada

Source: *Child Migrants Trust*

[Ordeal of Australia's child migrants](#)

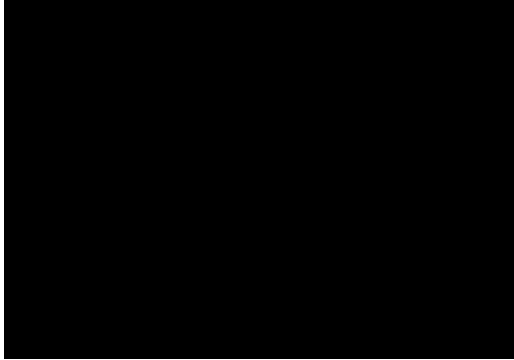
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Many of the children were lied to about their parents being dead

as young as three, had been sent to Australia.



Sandra Anker was sent out to Australia when she was six years old

Care agencies worked with the government to send disadvantaged children to a rosy future and supply what was deemed "good white stock" to a former colony.

In many cases they were educated only for farm work, and suffered cruelty and hardship including physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

The founder of the Child Migrants Trust, Margaret Humphreys, had travelled from the UK to Canberra for Mr Rudd's apology.

She said: "The trust has campaigned for over 20 years for this kind and degree of recognition. For child migrants, of course, it has been all their lives and for their families. "This is a moment - a significant moment - in the history of child migration. The recognition is vital if people are to recover."