



ATTORNEY-GENERAL  
THE HON ROBERT McCLELLAND MP

**International Conference on Child Labour  
and Child Exploitation**

**Cairns Convention Centre, Queensland**

**Sunday 3 August 2008, 1.30pm**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**[Acknowledgements]**

- **First, may I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet on – and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present.**

**[Other Acknowledgements]**

- **Chair, the Hon Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC, Former Chief Justice, the Family Court of Australia – and a tireless human rights advocate**
- **The Hon Desley Boyle, Qld Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry, Member for Cairns (also speaking)**

- **The Hon Darren Hughes, New Zealand Minister for Statistics**
- **International and distinguished guests**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**
- **And a special welcome to children**

## **[Introduction]**

- 1. It's a great pleasure to join you this morning, to speak on behalf of the Australian Government.**
- 2. The Rudd Government places a top priority on the rights of children – protecting them, caring for them and giving them every opportunity we can to lead a safe and happy life.**

**And we do this in many ways.**

- 3. For example, in my role as Attorney-General, I have responsibility for promoting and protecting human rights, to safeguard individuals of all ages.**
- 4. In the time since the election, the Government has announced its intention to put human rights firmly back on the radar.**  
**And I want to make sure that the rights of the child are not forgotten in this re-engagement.**
- 5. I also have responsibility for family law and I'm in the process of opening new Family Relationship Centres around Australia, such as the one I opened here earlier in the year.**

**These are helping separated families agree on parenting arrangements, rather than fighting it out in the courts.**

**And as they do this, we're making sure that the best interests of children are put first.**

- 6. Because I think Marian Wright Edelman summed it up beautifully when she said *If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much.***

**[The Conference]**

- 7. This conference gives us all, in our various roles, an opportunity to help safeguard children around the world.**

**Child exploitation is abhorrent.**

**If anything in this world is evil, it is.**

**It strikes at the most vulnerable members of our society.**

**It strikes at our very humanity.**

**It's going to take a co-ordinated effort by all of us, at all levels, to address this issue and ensure it**

**stays on the international human rights agenda, and that action occurs.**

- 8. I must say, the scene is certainly set for us to achieve this.**

**I'm very impressed with the conference program – it offers a smart range of topics and a strong range of experts.**

- 9. For my part, I'd like to share with you some of the ways the Australian Government is tackling the issues of child exploitation and child labour both domestically and internationally.**

**[A National Child Protection Framework]**

- 10. Most importantly, as a Government, we want to have a strategic approach to child exploitation. To achieve this, we're making sure our approach belongs to the nation.**
- 11. Child protection in Australia is primarily the responsibility of the States and Territories. The new Federal Government is not seeking to change that.**

**But the bottom line is that we all have a responsibility.**

**And as a Federal Government we can do much to improve co-ordination and to develop best practice response.**

**12. Through a broad consultation process we've been exploring how the Commonwealth, States, Territories and non-government organisations can use their significant resources more effectively to**

- ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, and**
- make sure the system works as effectively as possible.**

**13. This consultation has led to us working closely with the States, Territories and the community sector to develop Australia's first National Child Protection Framework.**

**This framework will not only spell out the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth, States and Territories.**

**It will also be a practical, action-focused document that takes a holistic approach to child safety and wellbeing.**

- 14. The framework will focus on stronger protection and earlier intervention for children and families. And by bringing the focus to early intervention, we want to reduce pressure on the child protection system that deals with the victims of child abuse.**

**We want to support children and families to avoid crisis situations arising in the first place.**

- 15. We're expecting the framework to be finalised by the end of this year – and we're determined to ensure it is implemented as matter of priority.**

**[New Directions]**

- 16. Unfortunately, though, we have a sad and shocking situation in Indigenous Australia. Compared to other Australian children, our Indigenous children are more likely to be the**

**victim of sexual exploitation, and they're more likely to die as infants.**

**17. Closing this gap is front and centre of the Rudd Government's policy, *New Directions for Indigenous Children*.**

**18. It goes hand-in-hand with the National Child Protection Framework.**

**Under this new policy, the Government is committed to:**

- closing the life expectancy gap within a generation**
- halving the mortality rates for indigenous children under five years of age, and**
- halving the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement within a decade.**

**19. And we do not take these commitments lightly.**

**20. We realise that a crucial part of closing the gap is keeping our Indigenous children safe, and free from exploitation and abuse.**

**Under the new framework, we'll be able to provide a systematic, cooperative approach to the**

**very complex issues that make our Indigenous children so vulnerable.**

**21. Part of this approach will focus on improving their access to proper education.**

**This is an important way to help protect and empower children.**

**And I think it was summed up well by the ILO in June, with their statement**

***Education – the right response to child labour.***

**[Newly Arrived Youth]**

**22. Another vulnerable group is young people who've recently migrated to Australia.**

**Many of these young people have been forced to leave their home country.**

**And often they need a lot of support to help them settle here successfully.**

**23. This is why we have the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service.**

**It offers a range of integrated services to newly arrived young people from culturally and**

**linguistically diverse backgrounds, who are homeless, or who are at risk of becoming homeless.**

**The Support Service improves their level of engagement with the social and economic life of the Australian community.**

**And as such, it helps protect them from exploitation and provide them with a brighter future, here in their new home.**

### **[Protection from Cyber-Exploitation]**

**24. More broadly, we, as a society, are becoming increasingly aware of the vulnerability of children on-line.**

**25. This is why the Australian Government has a range of criminal offences for online child sex-related activity.**

**At the Federal level, we have offences which criminalise the use of the internet for child pornography or child abuse.**

**And we also have offences relating to grooming or procuring a child for sexual activity.**

**26. To help us with this fight, we've recently invested \$125.8 million in a comprehensive range of cyber-safety measures.**

**27. This includes \$49 million for the Australian Federal Police to enforce cyber-safety laws.**

**This investment will allow the AFP to expand the capacity of its Child Protection Operations Team which detects and investigates online child exploitation.**

**28. We also intend to introduce legislation to enhance the capability of our law enforcement authorities to detect this reprehensible crime.**

**29. We've also established a Cyber-Safety Consultative Working Group.**

**That Group has representatives from the community, internet service providers, industry associations, business and government.**

**30. We firmly believe that this kind of cooperative approach is the best way to combat this insidious form of child exploitation.**

**[International Efforts]**

**31. So there are a range of measures we've taken to protect children here in Australia.**

**32. But, the problems of child labour and child exploitation are worldwide.**

**They require an international response.**

**For the rights of all children to be upheld and recognised, we must make a united effort.**

**33. This is why the Rudd Government wants to positively re-engage with the international community on human rights issues.**

**34. For far too long, Australia has stood on the sidelines of the international community and refused to take a leading role in promoting and protecting international human rights.**

**35. Australia is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

- 36. And in 2006 we ratified the ILO's Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.**
- 37. But the Rudd Government is keen to do more. That is why, in June, we were pleased to support the adoption by the ILO of a landmark Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation.**
- 38. This will strengthen the ILO's capacity to promote its Decent Work Agenda, and forge an effective response to the challenges of globalisation – including the abolition of child labour.**
- 39. I'd also like to say that the Rudd Government is looking forward to a very positive and productive engagement with the ILO – both as a Government Member and as a member of the ILO Governing Body, representing our close neighbours in the Pacific.**
- We'll be doing all we can to promote decent work, human rights and economic development.**

**[Extraterritorial laws]**

**40. Part of being a good international citizen and protecting the world's children involves utilising domestic legal frameworks to ensure the broadest possible protection for children across the world.**

**41. That's why some of the most important Australian laws in this regard extend to protect the children of other countries.**

**For example, it's an offence for Australians who are travelling overseas to be involved in sexual activity with any person under the age of 16.**

**It's also an offence for Australians to benefit from or encourage child sex tourism.**

**42. And I'm also keen to explore any other ways in which the Government can more broadly protect children overseas through the operation of extraterritorial laws.**

**[Conclusion]**

- 43. I'd like to conclude by acknowledging that Australia is an affluent country and that we are very fortunate in many ways.**
- So some of the topics being addressed at this conference may not be as visible to us here.**
- 44. But we are all part of the solution.**
- 45. There's an African proverb that says**  
*it takes a village to raise a child.*
- But I'd like to think that**  
*it takes a global village to protect a child.*
- That's all of us – working together – to fight child labour and child exploitation.**
- 46. Thank you for your dedication to this cause and your participation in this conference.**
- I wish you every success with your deliberations and look forward, very much, to hearing the outcomes.**

**ENDS**