

**National Victims of Crime Conference
23 September 2008
Adelaide**

Welcome by Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue

Thank you and good morning to everyone.

I am delighted to be here and to welcome you to Adelaide and in particular to this important conference.

In Aboriginal protocol, a formal 'welcome to country' is always undertaken by an Aboriginal elder who was born in the lands, or 'country', where the welcome is being offered.

I am a *Yankuntjatjara* woman from the APY lands, so I was not **born** on the Adelaide plains – but I have lived here for many years. And so I will extend my own, very warm (and unique) welcome to you on behalf of Aboriginal people.

It is important to remember that this gathering, which will take place over the next two days, is meeting on Aboriginal land.

Recognising and acknowledging this is a mark of respect for Aboriginal people.

Symbolically, the act of paying respect to Aboriginal people and culture in this way, signals good faith. It is an act that shows willingness to operate in harmonious and respectful ways.

Taking a moment to acknowledge and affirm the first people of this nation, also carries with it an understanding that Aboriginal people's rights and dignity have not been respected in the past.

So for all of these reasons it is appropriate to open these proceedings by remembering that the land on which we meet, was, is and always will be, Aboriginal land.

The themes of this conference are very relevant to Aboriginal people. We all know too well the consequences of having lives torn apart unjustly at the hands of others.

We also know from harsh experience, that if social systems do not operate effectively to support victims of crime – and gross injustice – it is very difficult, indeed, to rebuild strong, healthy and meaningful lives.

In advocating for rights of Aboriginal people, I have always maintained that the starting point needs to be in asking the questions:

- *What would a **good** and **ethical** society do in response to this issue?*
- *And... what responses are necessary to demonstrate the **rights** and **dignity** of all people in relation to this issue?*

I think these questions are relevant to your deliberations as well. And I am concerned when I hear such complex questions reduced to political chest beating about “getting tough on law and order”.

I am particularly pleased to see on your program that you have some sessions on sexual violence, rape and sexual abuse of children. This is very important work because the victims of these crimes are so often not heard – or believed.

Sometimes the very social structures that exist to protect and defend people, are involved in abusing and silencing these victims. In this way, victims of sexual violence may be doubly abused.

And so, I wish you well during this conference and in your work in the coming months and years to address injustice and to find resolution for the victims of crime.

I wish you the strength to work with integrity and courage – in ways which honour the spirit of this land.

Thank you.