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**The Lowitja Institute International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference 2016**

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(Check against delivery)

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Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners the Kulin Nations on whose lands we meet today.

Thank you Aunty Di Kerr and Mr Gheran Steel for your warm welcome to country.

Thank you Romlie [Mokak] for your kind introduction.

Dear friends,

When I was first approached about the idea of an Institute to be founded in my name, I'm afraid I wasn't very gracious at all.

I remember complaining that having an Institute named after me would mean that half of the country would think that I was dead!

I don't know if they still think I'm dead, but I feel very much alive and happy to be here with you sharing this moment.

And this is a special moment for the Lowitja Institute and for me personally.

When I agreed to have the Lowitja Institute named after me, I entrusted in the Institute my spirit and energy, my values and priorities.

I told them that I wanted them to be a courageous organisation committed to social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to match words to action, to achieve real, tangible and immediate outcomes.

Also, to be known throughout Australia as a strong and sustainable organisation.

More than six years have passed since I charged the Institute with all that, and looking at the work that it has done to date, looking at all of you here today, I can say that I am very proud of you.

As I look at this room full of national and international delegates and think of all the work that has gone into bringing you here, and all the work that you are about to do, I am particularly proud of you all.

Not that that is any reason for you to relax.

The future is in your hands, and you, the Lowitja Institute, and its partners, friends and supporters, all of you, still have a big job to do.

The country has a big job to do.

And I'm about to tell you what that job is.

First, I want to remind of the last few lines of a poem so many of us know and love, Song of Hope by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (known as Kath Walker):

To our fathers' fathers: The pain, the sorrow.

To our children's children: The glad tomorrow.

I can't help thinking back to the 12 year old Lowitja of the Colebrook Home in Adelaide, being told by the Matron that I'd never amount to anything.

I can't help thinking that it meant for me, for the course of my life, to be taken

together with my sisters from my mother, whom I didn't see for another 30 years.

I can't help thinking of my struggle for an education, for the opportunity to train as a nurse, of how I became increasingly aware of the deeply entrenched disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience in this country... and the fight, the lifelong fight, for social justice, for human rights for our peoples.

And I thank the true leaders like Pat Anderson who have fought by my side. Pat is energetic, and fearless. She's a legend. I thank her for her leadership over the years and for taking her vision through to the formation of the Lowitja Institute.

I acknowledge the despondency that we sometimes feel and its negative social consequences.

I honour the struggle, the pain, the sorrow.

But your job is to build the glad tomorrow.

Your job is to work ceaselessly, with confidence in who we are, with our knowledge timeless and modern, our endless strength and resilience, our capacity for hard work, our wise heads, our wonderful talented young.

We must be fearless in our work for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people.

We must be fearless in our work for Indigenous peoples the world over.

Now is the time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must take their rightful place at the heart of this nation.

We have outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and

organisations in this country. They are more than capable to guide the decisions that need to be made in a way that is true to our cultures and that will therefore have the right outcomes.

In order to empower our capabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be at the centre of the decisions.

We must work with government to get the job done; we want our non-Indigenous friends and colleagues to work with us. But it is important that we know when to step up and they know when to step aside.

I entrust you all to deliver on this agenda for us.

Although Pat is not able to be with us here today, she, Romlie and I stand side by side with our global family to achieve the best for Indigenous peoples.

Thank you very much.

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