CLOSING REMARKS

Michael Mansell

IN CLOSING DOWN I THINK THAT SOME DELEGATES MAY GO AWAY FROM the conference somewhat disappointed in the fact that despite the few days of deliberation, the speeches, and the fact that people have workshopped a number of issues, that nevertheless we still have the imprisonment rates, we still have the deaths in custody, we still have all the injustice in the Aboriginal community. They may walk away with an air of disappointment that these conferences really do not have an effect or to a large degree, do not have a real purpose. But I would urge people not to take that away as the most important memory they had from this conference because we cannot be expected to resolve problems which have built up over 200 years in a three-day conference.

All the features of the white man's system which impose themselves on Aboriginal people and cause the problems that we suffer have been built up over a long period. Attempts to reform the harshest effects of that system against Aboriginal people have in the past been done at the behest of white people. It is they who have stated what is in the best interests of Aboriginal people in the future. It is only in recent times that we are starting to change the agenda by having Aboriginal people at the forefront in bringing about that change, laying down the priorities for change through conferences such as this. Now that is a process in itself which takes some time to be accepted widely throughout both the Aboriginal communities and the white communities, especially at the government level. And so that is the context of the overall plan of bringing about reform to benefit all Aboriginal people in this country.

What we did not set out to do here at this conference was to resolve overnight all of the problems which we know next time we attend a conference, will still be there. What we really intended was to set down a program for reform, a program which is directed towards putting power back into the Aboriginal communities, taking away power that other people exercise over Aboriginal communities and allowing Aboriginal people the opportunity to build a future based on black ideas developed by black people in black people's time. If this conference is a part of that program then we have been to a large degree successful. I do not ask people to quell the rage within you about the injustices in Aboriginal communities, but we can be patient in developing a new strategy, based on new ideas which hopefully will bring about the new changes that we want.

I thank all the participants for coming from Aboriginal communities all around Australia to this conference, for being patient, for being workmanlike, for working

1. Edited from a transcript of Michael Mansell's closing remarks to the conference.
hard throughout the conference. If you have been paid by your organisations, you have earned your money. I think that if nothing else comes out of this conference other than the need for immediate implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations, then there is a need for many more workshops such as this to develop a very tight program of reform which governments must adopt as a priority, for the call has come from the black community. Thank you very much.