

Oration for the World Peace Day Assembly at the Cowra Peace Bell - 17.9.13

I would like to thank the organisers of the Cowra World Peace Bell Association for giving me the opportunity to visit your beautiful town and for providing me with the honour of attending this important event.

As President of the Children's Court, I am in a unique position to observe families; and children. I strongly believe that the way that we treat our kids, and the example we set for children, is an indicator of the health of our society.

It is a powerful reminder that we must not act as spectators, sitting idly by as we witness social failures, whether that failure is occurring locally, or globally. I believe that the idea of peace begins first in the family, then it finds expression in the community, and ultimately it will create peace internationally.

We adults must protect children and young people, but we must also respect their role as citizens and social actors, with their own legitimate views. We have moved on from the notion that children should be seen and not heard.

It is vital that communities such as Cowra mobilise all possible resources, families, volunteers, community groups, schools and government and non-government organisations and agencies to protect and promote children, as they are the nation's future.

We must all set positive examples for them, whether on the sports fields, in Parliament and other public forums. We must ensure that we provide them with the support and stability that they need in order to become socially conscious citizens on the local, national and global stage. And we must ensure that young people have a voice and are heard.

I will leave you all with this powerful statement made by Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General:

'...no one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth, severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.'