



**SPEECH BY MARY VICTOR O'REERI
27 July 2009**

Good afternoon everyone,

May I first of all join with my father, my family including Lendl, Bishop Saunders and my colleagues Kari Kristiansen and Richard Aspinall in welcoming you here today.

Welcome to Billard and welcome to the Blank Page Summit on Suicide.

Thank you for putting up your hand, thank you for traveling from close and far and thank you the confidence you have shown in our community by being here this week.

To be here together today is such a very great achievement.

Before I go any further I would like to acknowledge my family - my father, Stephen Victor Snr, my mother Dorothy Victor, my husband Nelson, my children and grandchildren which also means my nephews and nieces and also my brothers and sisters including my adopted sister Tauri D'Eatough.

My family has shown on an individual basis their love and care - you will see it all around you here in the community during your stay - and they have worked hard over many months to make the Summit happen.

They are the essence of the Summit and to them, I say thank you for what you do and say every day to strengthen our family life.

On behalf of my father and our whole family, I also convey our deepest gratitude to Kari Kristiansen, our external adviser and the Summit Director.

Kari, to know you is to respect you and in working with you, we learn more about ourselves and our freedoms and what we are truly capable of doing, not just for our community but for what we want to give to society as a whole. Thank you a million times over.

Today is a pivotal point in time for our community at Billard.

Today is the product of our highest aims.

Today has come about because we decided as a family to move out of the shadows and trust our instinct.

Today is also the day we invite you to trust in your instincts.

We ask you to join us in what we have built with our bare hands and our strong wills -

The Blank Page Summit on Suicide.

As we have planned it, the Summit is a process without compromise.

It is about more than hope - it is about recasting the die at the highest level within ourselves.

Friends and countrymen, when we lost not one but two boys - our brothers and my parents' beautiful sons - we could have become the walking dead ourselves.

We could have benchmarked suicide as a fault line within our family.

But our resolution was not to get stranded.

We knew we were very vulnerable - we didn't need research and statistics to tell us that.

But bigger than death is life.

And we knew there was more to life than just existing or having to keep tagging those within the family that were at risk of suicide.

What we found was our will to prevail and to grow and to change the course of our world and to stare down the statistics and predictors and trends.

What we decided was to be as great as we could be.

Today our kids - our primary kids - hate to miss even half an hour of school.

Some of our bigger kids are not here today because they are fulfilling their ambitions across the country.

Those amongst us who are struggling, one by one they know what can be and where there are stars that they can shoot for - no one is without a role model at their fingertips.

Just over a month ago we wrote a letter to a very special person. In the first sentence we said:

"The Summit will not be what we have worked hard for it to be WITHOUT YOU."

Ladies and gentlemen, that very special person is Minister Jenny Macklin.

When Jenny visited our community here in Billard in April, we showed her this spot where we're now gathered and said: "That's where the Summit will be held."

We know she believed us - we felt her confidence in us. But we're pretty sure that when she got our letter what drew her back was not the trees and the uncleared bushes!

What drew her back was us and what we stand for and her drive to break new ground at a grass roots level.

Today Jenny joins us after a very long journey - we welcome you, Jenny and say our thanks for making it back - we are so very happy to see you again.

When we sat with Jenny a little while ago over at the home block, we expressed to her what we need from her. We asked her to grant us her trust in the journey of this Summit. We underlined to her that we believe we have some profound work to do. We asked her to agree that we could meet again quite soon after the Summit, to share its outcomes and to test our wills together.

We are pleased to let you know Jenny as committed to do this - thank you, Jenny.

We cannot say what this Summit will create - after all, it is a BLANK PAGE SUMMIT.

What we know is that it is in all of our hands.

We stand before you as catalysts, as change agents, as natural peacemakers and as people searching for excellence.

Billard Community is our centre of excellence.

We have invited you personally here - each and everyone of you - so that you may share your excellence and change the course of life for Indigenous people.

Again please accept our heartfelt welcome, our warmest greetings and our total respect for your decision to join us at this innovative and groundbreaking event in time and space on our country.

Thank you.