



alannah & madeline
foundation

Media Release

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National Museum of Australia acquires letters from Walter Mikac to John Howard that impelled national reform on gun control

On Sunday 28 April 1996 at Port Arthur in Tasmania an unspeakable act of violence occurred. Among the 35 people who tragically died that day were Walter Mikac's wife, Nanette and their two young daughters, Alannah and Madeline. Nine days after the event, Walter sent a letter to then Prime Minister John Howard.

The correspondence between John Howard and Walter Mikac impelled a national reform on gun control in Australia — a defining moment in our nation's history.

Today the National Museum of Australia will host an event to mark the acquisition of a series of these letters where the Hon John Howard OM AC and Walter Mikac AM will be in attendance to speak about the pivotal role their communication played in reducing the risk of gun violence in Australia.

The event takes place just days after a meeting of all Police Ministers agreed to a proposal for a new National Firearms Register which will be put to the National Cabinet in July.

When asked how he found the strength to put pen to paper during that devastating time in 1996, Mr Mikac said, "Powerless and in deep grief, I was compelled to take action. Writing to Prime Minister John Howard was the logical choice. If our gun safety was going to change it had to come from the top.

"These letters demonstrate the power of what one positive decision in a time of trauma and senselessness can achieve," Mr Mikac said.

National Museum director, Dr Mathew Trinca, said "We feel a deep sense of responsibility that Mr Mikac has entrusted the National Museum with these letters which reflect his vision for a safer Australia during a time of unimaginable grief."

In 1997 Walter Mikac and a small group of volunteers, established the Alannah & Madeline Foundation in honour of his young daughters with the belief that "*all children should have a safe and happy childhood without being subjected to any form of violence.*"

Former prime minister John Howard, the inaugural patron of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, said, "Walter Mikac honoured the memory of his beloved wife and two little daughters, so tragically taken from him, by finding the courage to rebuild his life without them."

Firearm safety and protection of children from violence and harm is the origin story of the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, and although the challenges facing children and young people have changed over the last 26 years, their mission has not.

Progress has been made, however there is still work to be done. In the shadow of the Port Arthur tragedy there was a bi-partisan political response that saw the introduction of gun law reforms to make Australia safer from firearm violence, however after 27 years no state or territory government in Australia is fully compliant with the Agreement.

Stephen Bendle, Advocacy Advisor for the Alannah & Madeline Foundation and convenor of the Australian Gun Safety Alliance, said, "One unfulfilled requirement is a National Firearm Register and following recent firearm related fatalities, a national conversation has been stoked about the need for a single source of information on firearms for our law enforcement officers.

"We are very pleased that the Prime Minister, and all Premiers and Chief Ministers have agreed to the need for a National Firearm Register. Last Friday the Attorney General announced that a meeting of all Police Ministers had agreed to a proposal for a new National Firearms Register and that it would be put to a National Cabinet meeting in July.

So, after 27 years, one of the most important gun reform issues that every jurisdiction agreed to in 1996 will be put in place to make Australians safer from firearm violence." Mr Bendle said.

Mr Mikac agreed, adding "The Alannah & Madeline Foundation will remain vigilant in continuing to advocate to ensure Australia's gun laws remain responsible, safe and strong. We will continue to build a future where children, and all people, can live safe from gun violence."

The letters will be received by the National Museum of Australia for their Defining Moments in History archives and will be on temporary public display from 16 June in the Gandel Atrium at the museum. www.nma.gov.au

*To learn more about the **Alannah & Madeline Foundation's** advocacy work, speaking for and with children and young people, visit [Advocacy Programs](#) or the [Australian Gun Safety Alliance](#) (AGSA). www.alannahandmadeline.org.au*

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