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The word PM John Howard refuses to say

About 150,000 Australians have taken part in a walk of reconciliation across Sydney's Harbour Bridge in a gesture of support for the country's Aborigines.

People gathered soon after dawn, heading for a park on the edge of the harbour for a day of concerts, speeches and Aboriginal songs and dancing to mark the culmination of Corroboree, a three-day indigenous festive ceremony.

Walkers carried balloons in the colours of the Aboriginal flag as they made the 4km (2.5 mile) journey.

The Chairman of the Council for Reconciliation, Dr Evelyn Scott, says the strength of popular support for the walk has produced a mandate for a treaty between white and black Australia.

The weekend-long celebrations began when the council presented a document of reconciliation to political leaders - it asks for acknowledgement of past injustices.

Prime Minister John Howard opposes the idea of apologising for what happened in the past and has refused to do so on behalf of



Organisers say turnout provides a mandate for a treaty between black and white Australians

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the government.

Mr Howard was jeered and scores of people, among a Sydney Opera House audience turned their backs on him when he began speaking at a ceremony on Saturday.

But, as he has done many times, Mr Howard stopped short of saying the word "sorry". He also declined to join the walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Stolen generation

One of the most sensitive issues is that of the so-called 'stolen generation' - the children taken from their Aborigine parents between 1919 and 1970 by governments who wanted to rear them in a "civilised" environment.



"Corroboree" is an Aboriginal word referring to celebrations including song and dance

Up to 100,000 children were affected.

Charles Perkins, a leading member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, said: "Without an apology, there can be no real reconciliation."

But others share Mr Howard's hopes that Corroboree 2000 will help bring black and white Australians closer.

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