

LAW REFORM COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Coroners Act 1985

Melbourne — 20 September 2005

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Ms R. Smith, chair; and
Mr G. Hallett, elder, South Pacific Foundation of Victoria.

The CHAIR — I welcome the South Pacific Foundation of Victoria to this public hearing of the parliamentary Law Reform Committee. I particularly welcome George Hallett and Raina Smith. This is a public hearing and, as you can see, Hansard reporters are recording the proceedings.

Mr HALLETT — Because I am in the presence of my fellow countrymen I like to speak in the language, if that is okay.

Mr Hallett addressed committee in Maori.

Mr HALLETT — What I have just explained to you in the Maori language is that there are a lot of aspects to the submissions made by my partner Raina. During the years I have lived here — being the only elder in the whole of Victoria and throughout the whole of Australia — I have been involved in lot of the things that happen to our deceased, and this is the reason why I have to address you in the language that pertains to me and to Raina. It is very important.

Before I go into a lot of this, the reason for my attending this meeting is to let the people who are in charge of this know about the different things that happen in our culture. I am a minister of religion and cremation is one thing that is not allowed in my custom. That has been handed down from generation to generation. Since my arrival here I have had to go along with what the families suggest; I cannot go against them. This is because the only way they can get their loved ones home is in an urn; the reason being that to take an individual home whole is very costly. So I took it upon my own shoulders to go back to New Zealand and confide in my tribal elders, a lot of whom are still alive. They said that there was not all that much they could do. They said, ‘We will go with the flow; whatever you suggest’. I have come back and spoken with Raina about this topic and because of the situation I was placed in I thought the best thing to do was to have a look at the coroners thing. Everything Raina has put in the submission, I agree wholeheartedly with; whatever she has produced in this document. I have nothing further to add. As we go along perhaps I could answer a lot of your questions.

Ms SMITH — Thank you, Koro. Thank you to the committee also on behalf of the South Pacific Foundation of Victoria and on behalf of the communities of Pasifika Victoria for allowing us an opportunity to put forward a submission regarding the Coroners Act and how it impacts on our communities. This morning I am going to present a very quick overview of the cultural importance of deaths in our communities so that it may be able to bring a culture perspective to the submission. Why is the death of a loved one treated with such importance within Pasifika communities? It is because it is the life of the deceased we are acknowledging and not just the singular event of the person’s death. We are also continuing and maintaining our protocols and values, our tangihana as it is called, that has been handed down to our people from our ancestors for many generations. The death of a loved one brings into focus all of the aspects of that person’s being, including who his family is and who his ancestors were and how those relationships affect all of the wider Pasifika community.

The family or the whanau — when a person dies within our community the death impacts on the whole family as we live very much in an extended family structure. As such, aunties, uncles, cousins and distant relatives will all become involved in the tangihana, or the mourning and funeral arrangements. A tangihana will take precedence over all other events including work and social events that may have been organised prior to the death of the loved one. It is not uncommon for our people to take three or four days or even a week from their place of employment to be at the funeral or tangihana. Sometimes people will even lose a job, such is the importance of the tangihana. The New Zealand experience of the tangihana begins almost immediately upon hearing news of the death of the loved one. Family members will begin to arrive at the home or the marae — the marae is pictured, it is the gathering place, the meeting place that the deceased and his family affiliate with. You heard our kaumatua refer to his tribal area. Each of us within our communities have tribes that we affiliate to. Within the tribes and the communities are located our marae. The first priority as such then becomes the return of the body to the marae or to the home that the family or the whanau of the deceased affiliates with.

Here in Australia our experience has been somewhat different because we do not have the marae or the central meeting place. Therefore it is not uncommon for our people to gather at the home of a loved one for the purpose of awaiting the return of the body. As such, cooking and sleeping facilities are put in place within the family home in preparation for the two or three-day mourning period prior to the day of internment. In regard to that, I have been to many tangihana, and indeed so has my elder here, in which the backyard of the house has become the gathering place for literally hundreds of people. One tangihana that we had involved a Samoan gentleman and we actually had to hold it on the rugby field because we had some 600 mourners and no place to gather.

The waiting issue — as we indicate in our submission, the return of the body to the family who is now waiting becomes the key issue for all concerned. Those concerned are not confined to the immediate family but include the logistical team at the back of the family home who are preparing to stay, to take time off work, to cook meals for the next 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 days on some occasions and sometimes even longer while the mourning takes place at the house. I have made reference to that in the submission on page 24. If the body is not returned within a two or three-day period, the waiting can become an added stress in the already burdensome process of grief, not just for the immediate family but also for those involved in the cooking and the running of the household at the back. Added pressure is also brought to bear as the economic cost of hosting the whanau or family members — as our tikanga, our protocol, dictates that family members may not leave the family of the deceased person — starts to take its toll in terms of money, days off work et cetera. Other family members will also start arriving from overseas. If the deceased is from Samoa, the Cook Islands or New Zealand, other families may start arriving as well in preparation for taking the body back home.

Hoki wairua mai e tama, hoki mai ki te wa kainga, ki to iwi, hoki wairua mai! — return to us in spirit, son, return to your birthplace, to your people, return to us in spirit. This is a cultural prerequisite for our people upon dying in another country. We must attempt all possible avenues to get our loved ones home. We have recently been involved in a repatriation process with our dear friend the state coroner to repatriate sacred human remains back to New Zealand. This part of the wait also adds to the impact of the waiting period. Most of us will attempt to take our deceased back to our ancestral homeland for burial. This is another reason the release of the body becomes critical as we wait here in Australia and also for the ones at home who are awaiting the arrival of the loved one.

Once the body has been released the arrangements can proceed ahead in conjunction with consultation with all those who have gathered to offer support. Such discussions will include all aspects of the days ahead and all of the major decision making will be done in a collaborative and collective manner. During these discussions the immediate family — which may include the wife, the husband, the parents, the children, the siblings — is represented by another family member. They do not openly participate in the discussion of other arrangements. They are considered to be tapu or sacred to the whole process so somebody connected to the family, usually a respected member of the family or someone within the community — I have been asked to facilitate that process on many occasions — will meet with the immediate family to discuss the arrangements and will then discuss that with the wider whanau, the bigger group. These people I am referring to, the liaison people, are critical to ensuring the smooth flow of the process and ensuring the sacredness of the grieving family so they are left solely to grieve and their wishes are advanced and met.

The funeral itself will proceed and the immediate family's wishes will at all times be endeavoured — and I use the word 'endeavoured' — to be met. However, when required and always at the guidance or intervention of our elders, such as our elder here, the protocols for the tangihana or the funeral and the culture will take precedence over the wishes of the family if the feeling is that cultural values are being displaced. He touched a little bit on cremation. An example may be in the case that perhaps the wife may be of a non-cultural background and she may wish to eat and drink at the side of her husband who is lying in state in the lounge of the family home on most occasions, or she may want to go away and spend the night with her sister and leave her husband's side. That type of request would not be allowed within the cultural protocols. It is important that food and drink is kept away from the body because the body is considered to be tapu and in a state of sacredness and food is considered to be more of a common thing so those two items are always kept apart. It is common for the widow or the immediate family to stay at the side of the deceased and not to leave. That is part of our requirement. We also wash ourselves — sprinkle ourselves with water — once we leave the side of the deceased person. All of these etiquettes will be met in the interests of perhaps the wife.

Pasifika people are very strong in religion so the church plays a major role throughout the funeral process. There will be prayers in the morning and prayer, or karakia, will be held at night in the family home with the body and all the family gathered together. That is a prerequisite for the cultural protocol of the tangihana. In most Pasifika communities the minister will play an important role in the decision making and he will represent his community in every aspect of their daily lives. It may well be that that minister is the person who will liaise with the family, with officialdom, with the airlines — he will be that person.

In conclusion, the release of the body is an important issue for our people and expediency should be encouraged by the office of the coroner while at the same time we acknowledge and recognise that he also has to perform his duty satisfactorily. We believe that identifying key community liaison people within our cultural communities — and I am specifically relating to my own cultural community — to act on behalf of our families would be an effective

tool to facilitate effective communication between our people and the coroner's office. Obviously the coroner does not want to be dealing with 30 or 40 people given that we are an extended family network. Appropriate cultural training to provide insight into and support for the role of the coroner when dealing with cultural communities would be a possible solution to assist him in the performance of his duties. A raising of public awareness as to the role of the coroner may provide insight into and understanding of the logistical difficulties that may be confronting his office when dealing with a death.

We believe cultural training will provide an understanding of the nature of the collective decision making that occurs within our community, and it may highlight the notion of the definition of family not being confined to that of a preferred class status. It also protects the cultural rights of the deceased person in the event that attempts to deny him or her of their cultural rights following death should occur. For example, a spousal decision to cremate him privately without the family being allowed to attend a funeral would not be acceptable in our community, and certainly not to the person who may have died without making his wishes known. Another scenario to consider is a refusal to return him to his marae for the tangihana — these scenarios have happened — but to leave him in the care of the undertaker for the three days prior to the funeral. As I have alluded in the submission, we believe from the moment the body is returned to our care we must stay with that body right until it is buried to keep it warm. We acknowledge and recognise that even in death we are still human beings. That is part of the reason we think all deaths should be reported.

In regard to resourcing, we are very mindful that resourcing is an issue. However, our feeling is that the resourcing of such initiatives should lie with the government at the state level and that this resourcing is not the responsibility of the community. We believe preparing and presenting the views of communities such as at the committee today is our responsibility and providing the key people within communities to support the role of the coroner and the community is also the responsibility of the community.

In closing we wish to acknowledge we are living in a multicultural Victoria. We are mindful of the fact that we are living in another country and we also acknowledge that we are working towards a strategy to accommodate the needs and values of the cultures that exist within this multicultural society. We are also mindful that in order to address these needs we as a community must be visible and evident. That is part of our responsibility. Our community — and I am referring directly to Maori Pasifika communities — has in the past been culturally invisible. Today has been an opportunity — we believe it is a historic opportunity because it is the first time our communities have entered into such a process — and we are grateful for the opportunity to raise our visibility. I express our appreciation to this committee and we respectfully submit the submission for change on behalf of our people and our mokopuna, our grandchildren, a couple of whom are sitting in the back row. We are a people who see things in the past regarding our ancestors and where we come from, the present where we are placed now and we look to the future with our mokos. The reason for the submission is to address those three things as to who we are and to express our appreciation for the opportunity to do so in this country that we have chosen to be our home. We are very appreciative of the opportunity to call this country our home. I, too, am an Australian citizen, having taken up citizenship with my family in May. All of these issues, expressions and initiatives come from those feelings. We are now free to answer any questions in respect to the presentation or the submission.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, George and Raina, for your presentation on behalf of your community. Can I clarify something initially? I understand the foundation is a centre for 20 different cultural communities, including Cook Islands, Nuie, Tahiti, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Maori. Can you clarify two things: can you give us a sense of the extent of the community in Victoria; and in terms of the submission do these issues and cultural practices apply just to Maori or is it also to other Pacific Island groups?

Ms SMITH — The South Pacific Foundation of Victoria is an organisation that has been in place since 2003. The role of the organisation is to act as an umbrella body, a peak organisation, a point of entry for those 20 cultural communities. The Micronesian, the Melanesian and the Polynesian communities from which I descend are interrelated in terms of our history, values, culture and in some cases our languages. So we have connections. Some of the Melanesian and Micronesian communities would include the Fijian and Papua New Guinea communities who we work with. Although they are smaller in terms of their numbers, they are still very much part of the work we do. The SPF, as I will refer to it, is a point of entry for communities. Our role is to raise visibility such as what I am doing today for the communities and to act as a voice for them.

The CHAIR — And the total population?

Ms SMITH — It is 48 000 Pasifika Victorians in total, of whom 10 000 are from the Maori community. We have accessed those figures from Dr Dennis Trewin, an Australian statistician, who we visited earlier this year so we could present a cultural profile to state government.

The CHAIR — And in terms of the cultural issues you have raised?

Ms SMITH — They are across the board because we share similar cultural values. The Solomon Islanders are a community of 400. We have Tongans who come in at 2400, so they are smaller but they all link into the SPF. Because we share those cultural ties, they are very similar. There may well be differences in terms of actual practices, but the thinking and psyche of the cultures are very similar.

The CHAIR — In the submission you indicated that all deaths should be reported to the coroner but the coroner should decide which deaths to investigate. In another part of the submission it indicates that decisions to report a death in Maori culture are community-based decisions and the act should state that cultural and spiritual influences will prevail when communities decide whether to report a death. I am just trying to understand those two different strands in your submission.

Ms SMITH — Can you just give me the reference for that second statement? I might have been quoting from somebody else. The thinking that all deaths should be reported came directly from the forum we convened. That was the view that forum members, the participants, forwarded. The feeling was based on the fact that all human life is sacred and important. It was an overall feeling as opposed to any actual thinking as to how that would actually work in terms of resourcing. That is how we operate — we operate very much from a cultural perspective so our framework of reference is always cultural. The feeling we have is that all human life is important and all deaths should be reported. In regard to your second statement I am wondering if I may have quoted that from one of the reports I used in my submission.

The CHAIR — I will need to find it again.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I must put on the record my appreciation of the submission, which is very good. You have covered a range of issues specific to your communities very effectively. Congratulations to you, the forum and the elder for overseeing it. There are a couple of issues though in relation to how the coroner would perceive one culture. How do you see the coroner applying your cultural needs against the fact that, as you rightly indicate, Victoria, indeed Australia, has quite a large multicultural community? The coroner would have to balance perhaps 300 to 400 cultures. I understand you are accommodating some of those concerns. How do you see that application with not only your culture but the many hundreds of others in Victoria? I am concerned in the sense that whilst a guideline set for your community will address your community needs, we will end up having a large book that the coroner will have to refer to in terms of every culture. How do you see that? I see how you are looking at it in isolation, but I am wondering how the application would apply across the whole of the coroner per se?

Ms SMITH — The wording of the act could perhaps include the terms ‘cultural practices’ or giving due consideration to cultural practices. That way it is more a generic application of the word ‘culture’ and it would sufficiently accommodate the 180 different cultures. I am not asking that we be specifically identified in terms of the act, but I do not believe the words ‘culture practices, appropriateness or sensitivity’ appear within the existing act. That is what we are leading to. If it is enshrined in the act, we have some access or way to negotiate with the coroner with regard to our cultural practices. We are not overshadowing or taking precedence over other cultures. We appreciate fully the logistical difficulty the coroner must encounter when dealing with deceased from various cultural and religious, spiritual backgrounds. We would see it as having those simple words as an avenue or vehicle for us to negotiate and say to the coroner’s office, ‘Can you give consideration as per the act to our cultural sensitivities?’. Perhaps that is one way.

Mr HILTON — I think Richard’s point is that we do not want a situation where there are 300 different practices dependent on the cultural background of each deceased. That would be totally unworkable.

Ms SMITH — From our perspective the only real cultural practice would be the expedient release of the body. There are only a couple of processes that would be well defined — the release of the body, the issue of autopsy which really is a communication and consultation process. Those two issues, which I believe I have outlined in the submission are the expedient release of the body; the autopsy procedure and effective communication with family members. I do not believe they are specific cultural practices but they are particularly important to us. Perhaps the notion of working with community people — and as I said, our responsibility as a

community would be to make those people known to the coroner — would be to make communicating with the family effective and to also redress the notion of the coroner having to discuss the same old issue with 30, 40, 50 members of the one family. Those would be our feelings. With the liaison process the wording would allow for the addressing of the very specific processes which are the releasing of the body and letting us know about the autopsy. Those are the key components for our community and I do not believe they are culturally specific.

The CHAIR — I do not think we have actually had an opportunity to discuss this with the coroner here, but when we looked at various jurisdictions it was very clear that what worked well was that process of negotiation with elders or representatives of the community to come up with some means by which the cultural or religious practices could be accommodated, taking into account the need of the coroner to do his or her statutory job.

Ms SMITH — Yes, his requirements.

The CHAIR — This goes to questions of autopsy, it goes to questions of when the body is released and it goes to questions of when burials can occur. I think what you are saying, in a sense, is that if it is enshrined in the act, that is something the coroner — and I believe this coroner is very sensitive to those issues — needs to take into account in setting up a new framework in the future.

Ms SMITH — That is correct.

The CHAIR — Sorry I could not find it straight away; it was under ‘Community awareness’.

Ms SMITH — What page was that?

The CHAIR — On page 8 of your submission you talk about death certification, where the forum responded and said that all deaths should be reported. Then in part 4, under the heading ‘Community awareness’ it says:

We make all decisions pertaining to deaths, based on our cultural values and protocols (tikanga). This would include any decision to report a death.

I am just trying to understand those two different phrases.

Ms SMITH — I am probably talking retrospectively there. As a community we do not immediately think to report death; we are not very empowered in that sense. If we are required to report a death it is not something we would instigate ourselves; it is something we would need to be told. I am talking in the sense of what we are at the moment, how we think. We do, however, feel strongly from the forum that all deaths should be reported, so if that was part of the act, that statement would in fact be invalid or ineffective because then we would have an understanding that the death needs to be reported.

The CHAIR — And your rationale for why all deaths should be reported?

Ms SMITH — Based on our cultural perspective, once again. The feeling from the forum that our people are important; that every human being is important. I might just allow our Kaumatua to talk a little about the importance of life and why all deaths should be reported.

Mr HALLETT — Within the Maori New Zealand community and what death means to the Maori, they think more of a person who is lying in state at the time of death than when he is alive. A person who is lying in state, to the Maori, is very precious. It is like a gift.

The CHAIR — Why do you want to necessarily involve the coroner in every death? I ask that because in some instances you are saying that doing that might actually create some problems for the community. I understand the importance to you culturally of the person in death and what that means, but I am trying to understand the reasoning behind involving the coroner in each and every death, particularly when it ends up creating some problems.

Ms SMITH — Adding extra time to the release. I think the thinking at that stage of the forum was to bring closure to the family and also to bring dignity to the death of the human being, which is what this Kaumatua is referring to. The coroners office is seen in that light by our people; as being the authoritative body that can bring dignity to that death, rather than how it exists at the moment. I think we were not considering resourcing or the

implications of how all of this would work, which again goes back to my statement that we were thinking from our cultural framework. The thinking is to bring the mana, or the dignity, to this person would require the coroner's officer to certify their death. That is how we perceive things. In terms of logistics and rationale we do it from our cultural perspective, 1 and 1 may not always make 2, as you have noticed.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — If we could not recommend that you would accept the notion and you would understand why?

Ms SMITH — Exactly; we would accept that. What we are saying is that we do not believe this should be enshrined in statutes, but this is the feeling. Because of the type of people we are we needed to make a statement to bring value to all of it. As our elder has said, when you have passed away you are elevated. It does not matter what sort of person you were in your lifetime, you are elevated to a position where you are a special person because this is the last time we are going to see you. I want to talk now about the repatriation of human remains. We have just been involved with some 10 human remains. We had a wonderfully moving farewell for these remains and if you take away all the cultural side of it, it was just skulls and bones and fragments. To us this is not so. To us it was worthy of a wonderful celebration and farewell and grieving. People from New Zealand, the Te Papa people from the national Museum of New Zealand, flew over in accordance with our culture to escort these remains back. To highlight this to you, one of the remains that was handed back has been in Australia for many years with a private family. As he said, these are all gifts given back to our people, and so we needed to honour them and give them the dignity and respect they deserved. We are like that with everyone who passes away.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — And everyone who passes away, if they were born, the grandchildren — —

Ms SMITH — Mokopuna Kiora.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I could not get the word right. In years to come they too will pass on; become a gift. Their remains would remain in Australia, is that right?

Ms SMITH — No, probably not. The thinking of the parents, the grandparents and the family back in New Zealand who know of their existence would be to take them home.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Home is always external of Australia.

Ms SMITH — Home is always the ancestral homeland. It is like I indicated in the slide; we always return to our ancestral home whether we were born there or not. The thinking of our family members is that we have that extended family. We may have our parents there; if the mokopuna passes away, here our responsibility and our thinking would be to take that mokopuna back to those tribal lands. We are transient people here. If we bury them here we do not know whether we will be here tomorrow, so we are thinking always in a futuristic way again: take them back to the home that will never shift. So it does not matter whether we end up in living Victoria or in Perth, we cannot leave our remains in Victoria and go off somewhere else. That is another reason why we do that.

Ms BEATTIE — Thank you, George and Raina, for your presentation and thank you for bringing the wisdom of your elder here today for us. I would like to touch on what happens informally now within the coronial process because I know different cultures do not want to leave their relative or their loved one. Have you found that informally the coroner's processes allow you to follow your cultural needs, and what would change if that was enshrined in the Coroners Act?

Ms SMITH — From my own experience — and this elder has been here a number of years so he has had much more experience — but I too in my six short years have had many experiences with repatriating our loved ones back to New Zealand and generally dealing with the loved ones. This is because within my own community circle I, too, am called upon to be the liaison person, even though I am not related on many occasions to the death of the loved one. The greatest thing that challenges our people in dealing with the coroner's office is the huge gap that we see existing between the coroner's office here — as a structure, this grey building — and us down here as people in a backyard somewhere trying to arrange a funeral. There is this huge distance. Quite often for our people the challenge is how do we talk to a coroner who is at that level when we are here. It is a personal confrontation and challenge for our people to, firstly, engage with the coroner.

Quite often what happens, in our experience, is that three, four or five of our members might all try to ring the coroner independently, and none of them may feel comfortable or confident to say, 'Is there any way we can make

this happen fast?'. In the past we have just tended to let things go according to what the office says. If you say it is 14 days, we will hang the phone up and we grieve and all sorts of things, but we go with that. What we are saying today is we would like something enshrined in the act — those words, perhaps, 'cultural sensitivities' — so that at least provides us with a vehicle to say, 'Within our cultural sensitivity as per the act, is there any way that we can expedite this process?'. I believe it will secure negotiation for the future.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Do you know if there is a cultural liaison officer within the coroners court?

Ms SMITH — I am unaware of one.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — So that would be a good recommendation?

Ms SMITH — Yes. We have only just begun engaging with the coroner, and the coroner himself has not created that huge gap that I was talking about; that has come from our own creation because of who we are. We have been invisible for many years and that is because — —

Mr DALLA-RIVA — It would be a good recommendation that you are suggesting.

Ms SMITH — Yes. I believe so, because we are basically a shy people. We are not assertive or forward; we are shy people.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — So if they say 14 days, you will wait 14 days?

Ms SMITH — We wait 14 days, and it has not been uncommon for us to do that.

Ms BEATTIE — However, there are other cultures who want the body repatriated to the family as quickly as possible?

Ms SMITH — Yes, and we are aware of that, quietly aware of that.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Who might be more forceful because of their culture.

Ms SMITH — Yes.

The CHAIR — Can I ask you a question about guarding the body that you referred to in the submission by the kaitiaki You were indicating that the person must not lie alone between death and burial. Many Maori find the physical coldness and isolation of the hospital mortuary contrary to the Maori view that the body and the soul of the deceased must be kept continually warm. I am trying to understand this concept. Is it just accompanying the body or is there actually something physical about the body being not allowed to go unduly cold?

Ms SMITH — It is being attended. I would really like the elder to answer the question but I do not know if he can hear because he has left his hearing aid in the car. You want to understand why it is important for us to stay with the body?

The CHAIR — The nature of it. When you say warming the body, is it actually keeping the body warm, or is it doing something else?

Mr HALLETT — She is asking me why we have to keep the body warm?

The CHAIR — Not why: what is it? Is it just staying with the body or is it something else?

Ms SMITH — Yes, a physical presence.

The CHAIR — Do you have to do anything else?

Mr HALLETT — It is a physical presence of being with that body the whole time.

The CHAIR — Have you made any such requests to the coroner? If so, what response have you had?

Mr HALLETT — If for argument's sake 100 people were to turn up at the funeral and all go for a meal, they always leave one person. One person must remain with that body at all times.

The CHAIR — I understand that. I am just trying to understand what is happening at the mortuary now.

Ms SMITH — No, in the past we have not made approaches to be in the mortuary or to stay there, because I think the feeling and the thinking from our community is that that is not available to us to do. We are a community that takes on board certain roles, responsibilities and regulations. We know what we can and cannot do, so we tend to take that on board as well. We are a suffer-in-silence community.

Mr HALLETT — What happened here a couple of years ago, there was an old lady and her grandchild went to hop over the fence. It was a spiked fence, and when he went over he tripped and bent himself on the thing. Because they were living in a little flat they never had any room, so they kept him at the undertakers, at the chapel. When we walked in she was there, and she said, 'I cannot take him home; I am going to stay here with him'. The undertaker was very good. He took all the cushions off the couches and put them on the floor. Then he asked us if it was okay to put him on the floor, so we said, 'Yes'. They took him off the trolley in this casket and for the four days she slept on the floor with him and the people came in the evening.

Ms SMITH — That example might give you an idea of what we mean by that, so it is a physical presence.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for coming. It gives us a very interesting and fascinating insight into your culture and the needs of your culture in relation to burying the dead. I am glad you overcame your reticence to do it. Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.