

Indigenous Peoples Organisations (IPO) Network

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate distribution

Friday 27 May 2011

“ALS takes Deaths in Custody to the UN”

The Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM) of South Australia, Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (ALSWA) and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) have combined forces to take the message about deaths in custody and Indigenous incarceration to the United Nations.

The Aboriginal Legal Services held a joint side event “Royal Commission 20 years on – it’s time for change” in New York at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) on Tuesday 24 May 2011, which was well attended by Australian and international delegates to the UNPFII. Indigenous delegate to UNPFII, Cathy Eatock, presented along with the Chairperson of ALRM, Frank Lampard, Chief Executive Officer of VALS, Wayne Muir and Public Interest Solicitor from ALSWA, Tammy Solonec.

Ms Eatock explained the historical background to the Royal Commission via a series of photograph from the initial campaign. “The opportunity to present these photos at the United Nations was important because deaths in custody is still so critical for Aboriginal people today. It was an emotional experience for me because a lot of the people I worked closely with in that campaign have now passed away. It was a chance to honour them and the families of victims I worked with. It was also fitting to deliver this at the United Nations because the Royal Commission was called in 1987 following it being raised at the UN by Helen Corbett,” said Ms Eatock.

Ms Solonec spoke about the recommendations relating to Coronial Inquests. Ms Solonec has worked on a number of Coronial Inquests at ALSWA, where deaths in custody continue to occur at unacceptable levels. “Every time an Aboriginal person dies in custody, there are so many questions to be answered, so much grief to overcome and so many policies to be changed. All Governments of Australia need to get serious about deaths in custody. There needs to be proper implementation of all Coronial Inquest recommendations and the recommendations of the Royal Commission to prevent further deaths. It’s just not good enough to be having unnecessary deaths in a wealthy nation such as Australia.”

Mr Lampard chaired the event and spoke about the conditions in prisons including through care and support services provided by his organisation, the Aboriginal Prisoners and Offenders Support Services (APOSS). “The incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia have increased exponentially since the Royal Commission and that’s just not acceptable. There is a clear need for the Governments of Australia to be much more strategic about reducing Indigenous incarceration and providing quality through care, reintegration and rehabilitative services to Indigenous people.”

Mr Muir spoke about the recommendations relating to police engagement with Indigenous peoples and the situation today. “It is clear that the key recommendation about police engagement coming from the Royal Commission, that imprisonment should always be a last resort, is not being adhered to. Police in all States and Territories need to be reminded of this.”

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IPO Media Contacts:

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Below are five photographs that can be provided in high resolution. Please email an IPO media contact for a high resolution version of these photos.



The Side Event



From left, Frank Lampard, Tammy Solonec and Wayne Muir.



Cathy Eatock



Tammy Solonec



Wayne Muir