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PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES THROUGH
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

14 February 2010

DECLARATION BELL RINGS FOR CHANGE

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council has presented the Alyawarra people in Central Australia with a unique gift to mark the opening of its protest house near Ampilatwatja more than 350 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs.

The Alyawarra elders and families were today presented with a large brass Declaration Bell and a message of support from NSWALC's Governing Council at the opening of the protest house.

The presentation was made by NSWALC's Chief Executive, Mr Geoff Scott, who attended the opening ceremony on behalf of the Council, the peak Aboriginal representative body in New South Wales.

Mr. Scott told the community NSWALC's Governing Council wanted to ensure that Aboriginal people from Eastern Australia were aware of their ongoing struggle for recognition and basic housing and essential services.

He said NSWALC's Governing Council hoped the Declaration Bell would ring throughout the Alyawarra protest camp for "justice and change."

Mr. Scott said a framed message of support from NSWALC was also presented to the tiny community.

It recognised the ongoing struggle of the men, women and children of the Alyawarra nation "to retain and exercise their hard won rights to build a better future now and into the future."

"The decision to walk off your government controlled community and set up a permanent camp to protest this intervention in your lives following decades of neglect has the full support of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council and our land rights network," the message reads

"Your action, in the face of such a denial of your human rights, has shone a powerful spotlight on one of the sorriest episodes in your long struggle for land rights and social justice.

"We are sure your action has not been without its own share of deprivation and hardship.

"We applaud your courage and your commitment.

“You deserve the full support of all Aboriginal brothers and sisters around Australia who seek to assert their rights in accord with the principles of self determination set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Stay strong!”

Mr. Scott said many Aboriginal people in New South Wales could well understand why Aboriginal elders and families decided to walk off their government controlled community at Ampilatwatja in July and set up a permanent protest camp.

They had understood when the Federal Government acquired their land on a five year lease that it would bring new public housing and repairs to crumbling or non existent infrastructure. But it never came.

With 25-year old pipes broken and sewage running through the streets it was decided to abandon the government controlled community and set up a permanent protest camp outside of the boundary of Ampilatwatja.

Mr. Scott said the residents of many former reserves and missions in NSW, while not as isolated, were struggling daily with poor housing and ailing infrastructure.

NSWALC's Governing Council had been forced to commit \$100 million of its own compensation monies for land dispossession to ensure the provision of safe water and sewerage systems in Aboriginal communities in NSW.

The Council's decision had ensured the NSW Government would commit a similar amount of taxpayers money for the first time ever to ensure people living in those communities could enjoy the same basic standard of living as their fellow Australians.

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