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PRESS RELEASE RE CLOSING THE GAP 12.2.17

By Norman Miller, Centre for International Reconciliation and Peace



Norman Miller with Closing the Gap hand he painted

“Don’t abandon the Closing the Gap” program to reduce inequality between Indigenous people and other Australians” said Cairns Indigenous leader and Pastor Norman Miller who is President of the Centre for International Reconciliation and Peace.

“It is appalling that Indigenous children are still dying at a far greater rate than the rest of the community and Indigenous adults die at a much younger age due to poor health.”

“Then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Australian parliament apologized to Indigenous people ten years ago for the stolen generation with the overwhelming support of Australians of goodwill. This was symbolic reconciliation but important,” said Ps Miller.

“The Closing the Gap program is a practical reconciliation measure to reduce disparity and social disadvantage so that the quality of life of Indigenous people will be closer to that of other Australians.

However, at the ten-year anniversary we find it has been a colossal failure with only one of seven targets reached and the likelihood of other targets being very low” said Miller.

“We don’t want band aid solutions! We want healing of deep wounds. There does need to be a shake-up as the government has proposed but unless they properly consult with and listen to Indigenous people, we’ll be repeating the failures of the past.

“Does Prime Minister Turnbull want to be known as a leader without a vision for Indigenous affairs and one who is deaf to our asking for a voice? Does he want to go down as having one of the worst governments in the history of Indigenous affairs?

“A review of Closing the Gap has accused the Federal Government of effectively abandoning the policy after five years because of cutting \$530 million from the Indigenous affairs budget in 2014.

“The Federal Government is talking about refreshing the program by adopting new targets and I would urge it to adopt targets to reduce overcrowding in housing, reduce homelessness, reduce violence against women and reduce rates of incarceration and child removal.

“I have just come back from a Justice with Treaty workshop held in Redfern, Sydney just before Australia Day and I support the Uluru Statement which the government has turned its back on. However, I have been campaigning for racism to be removed from the constitution and I have not given up on that.

“On Wednesday 13 February, 10 years since the Apology, I will be doing a solitary silent protest walk around Cairns in support of reaching these targets and not abandoning them. As in the hands up for reconciliation, my placard, which I have painted myself as an Aboriginal artist, is a large hand with the current 7 points of the Closing the Gap program on it” said Ps Miller.

Signed

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