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## PRESS RELEASE RE RECONCILIATION WEEK 21.5.17

By Norman Miller, Centre for International Reconciliation and Peace Inc.

“Reconciliation Week 27 May to 3 June 2017 is special because three major anniversaries are being celebrated,” said Cairns Indigenous leader and Pastor Norman Miller who is President of the Centre for International Reconciliation and Peace.

“It is really an 8-day commemoration. We have the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home Report* on 26 May, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the successful 1967 Referendum on 27 May and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision on 3 June,” said Pastor Miller. “They mark significant milestones in our nation’s reconciliation journey.”

“The *Bringing Them Home Report*, also known as the Stolen Generation Report, covers how Indigenous children were separated, often by force from their families and communities, ostensibly for their protection but also as an act of assimilation,” said Pastor Miller.

“The 26 May has been commemorated since its release as National Sorry Day and later Journey of Healing Day. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd led the Parliament in an Apology for this in 2008. I presented a painting with over 200 colours to Mr Rudd at Parliament House Canberra as a thank you for his apology,” said Pastor Miller.

On 27 May, 1967 was the historic referendum when over 90% of Australians voted that Indigenous people should be counted in the census and that the Commonwealth government had power to enact legislation for Indigenous people.

“It has been called Recognition Day as part of Reconciliation Week,” said Miller. “Our church hosted an event to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the referendum, giving out certificates to the many Indigenous people from the Cairns region who were involved in the referendum campaign.”

He said, “The recognition debate has entered a new era with moves toward recognizing Indigenous people in the constitution and removing racism from it. I presented the *Boomerang Petition* to the Speaker, the Hon. Tony Smith, at 11am on 8.2.16 at Parliament House Canberra. I had over 5,000 signatures from all over Australia supporting the recognition of Indigenous people in the constitution, including Mayors from Cape York. This included 2,000 signatures I presented to Parliament on the last sitting day in 2012. I also presented a giant boomerang with 360 signatures on the back to Speaker Bronwyn Bishop at Parliament House Canberra in November 2012. On the front I had painted ‘No Racism in the Constitution’.”

“Until our constitution recognizes Indigenous people were in Australia long before European settlement, then we have a ‘**settler constitution.**’ It is a constitution that sets out state rights and commonwealth rights as if Indigenous people did not exist or were invisible” Miller maintained.

“After a series of meetings around Australia organised by Recognize, a meeting will be held at Uluru during Reconciliation Week to decide on a model which is likely to reject what has been called a minimalist position and call for more substantive change. Some Indigenous people campaigning for sovereignty and a treaty will probably reject a referendum and will want a big step forward for Indigenous people rather than a small step forward,” Miller said.

“It took the Mabo decision of 1992 to overthrow the legal fiction of ‘terra nullius’ i.e. that the land we now know as Australia was uninhabited before European settlement. Our invisibility as a people, despite our colour, has been a disturbing issue in the social landscape of our nation,” he continued. “Mabo Day commemorates the recognition of native title and many Indigenous Land Use Agreements around the nation are a form of practical reconciliation.”

The theme of Reconciliation Week 2017 is *Let’s Take the Next Steps*. “Let’s take the next steps forward together in a spirit of reconciliation,” said Pastor Miller.

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