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Press Release 31.5.18 re Reconciliation Week 2018



Millers outside the office of the State Member for Cairns Mr Michael Healy

Chairman and co-founder of the Centre for International Reconciliation and Peace, Munganbana Norman Miller, who is also an Aboriginal artist has made an impassioned plea for the unfinished business of stolen wages of Indigenous people to be finalized with compensation.

Miller said, "I will be campaigning outside the office of the State Member for Cairns Mr Michael Healy at 10.30am Friday 1 June and then walking to the Esplanade. I am happy for people to join me.

"I have created 3 pieces of art as part of a campaign to have stolen wages to Indigenous people returned – one is a huge cheque on canvas for 100 million dollars signed off by Premier Anastacia Palaczuk and Treasurer Jackie Trad from Queensland Government treasury and dated ASAP. The other two pieces are wooden dollar signs, one with Stolen Wages written on it and one a brief timeline of key dates. I am fitting in with the theme for Reconciliation Week 2018 - 'Don't Keep History a Mystery.'

“In 1897, legislation allowed the Queensland government to control the wages and savings of Indigenous people and in 1943, the Aborigines Welfare Fund was set up to receive the wages of Aboriginal people under the Queensland Aborigines Act and the government kept large amounts to use as general expenditure for the Queensland population only allowing a small amount to get into the hands of Aboriginal workers whose savings accounts were often kept at police stations. This is appalling,” said Mr Miller.

“Not only were they keeping most of the wages, but they were paying under award wages to Aborigines living on reserves, refusing to change even after the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA). It was not until 1986 that award wages were paid on the reserves which by now were called communities and many staff were sacked so that the wages bill would stay the same.

“It wasn’t until as recently as 1996 that 7 Palm Island workers won a court case against the Queensland government for underpayment of wages since the RDA 1975 and received a small amount back - \$7,000 each. In 1999, this \$7,000 payout was extended to other Aboriginal workers but they had to be able to prove they were owed wages which was difficult as wages slips were not always supplied. This was still an inadequate payout considering what was owed and some of the people owed money had died.

“Finally, in 2002, the Queensland government launched an Indigenous Wages and Savings Reparations Offer and in 2008, the government tried to get rid of the problem by closing the Aborigines Welfare Fund and putting the remaining money into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education funding.

“Hans Pearson started a class action in 2016 to recover monies owed and we are awaiting the outcome of this. But what it has meant is intergenerational poverty for our people. Children have been brought up in poverty and malnourished and their health has suffered. Grandparents and parents have not been able to pass on an inheritance to future generations,” said Miller. “It is a tragedy.”

“This is an outstanding debt that needs to be met and it’s been a long time coming but a change has to come, a now change. We need a **bank reconciliation**. With caring for country, the Indigenous community has been forgotten and finances could help generate a better sustainability economically. The government has recently announced about \$45 billion for infrastructure in Queensland and there may be a need for that but our money from our hard-earned wages has been illegally used in past decades to provide infrastructure for Queenslanders that should have come out of general revenue.

Signed:

Munganbana Norman Miller, 31.5.18

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