



## PRESS RELEASE

### European Network for Indigenous Australian Rights (ENIAR)

#### 25 May 2007 - Sorry Day Event - London, UK

Come celebrate Australian Indigenous culture and remember the Stolen Generations on Friday 25 May at Victoria Embankment Gardens from 6pm to 8pm.

Each year on Sorry Day 26 May Australia remembers the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal Children who were forcibly removed from their families. The UK event will conclude in London as dawn breaks in Australia on 26 May.

Sorry Day UK 2007 will give an Indigenous perspective of Australian history through story, dance, song, poetry, art and music. Indigenous and non-Indigenous performers will outline Indigenous history with stories from the Dreamtime, portraits of Indigenous life and culture before white settlement, moving through post settlement experiences to current issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Musicians, poets and writers taking part will include Francis Firebrace, Brigitte Anderssen and Kay Walton plus speakers including Tristram Besterman and Joanna Lathan. Rikki Shields and his children will invite the audience to join them in the kangaroo hunt dance. The MC will be Chris Robinson, a former ABC and Koori Radio broadcaster.

Sorry Day is organised by the European Network for Indigenous Australian Rights (ENIAR), a volunteer group which aims to increase awareness of Indigenous Australian issues in Europe and the UK. This is the third London Sorry Day.

Gill Watson, ENIAR coordinator states:

*"This year's event is especially significant as it marks the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum which led to the amendment of legislation to give Aboriginals the same citizen rights as other Australians. It marks the 10th anniversary of the publication of the 'Bringing them Home Report' on the Indigenous children forcibly removed from their families. It also follows the recent win by Tasmanian Aboriginals to have their ancestral remains returned to them from the Natural History Museum. Sorry Day UK 2007 not only acknowledges these landmark issues, but celebrates Indigenous culture and supports the journey of healing for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians".*

This year's Sorry Day event in London follows the successful campaign by Tasmanian Aborigines, supported by ENIAR, to have their ancestors' remains returned to them from the Natural History Museum.

The 2007 Sorry Day UK has the full support of the National Sorry Day Committee and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR).

Refreshments, disability access and seating are available in the Gardens. Free event, all welcome.

Sorry Day UK 6-8 pm Friday 25 May 2007  
Victoria Embankment Gardens Bandstand, London WC2N 6PB  
Closest tube: Embankment  
*For more information email [info@eniar.org](mailto:info@eniar.org) or go to [www.eniar.org](http://www.eniar.org)*

## **Notes to Editors**

Sorry Day remembers the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families from the first days of European occupation of Australia until the 1970's. Up to 100,000 children were removed between 1910 and 1970- between 10% and 30% of all Aboriginal children. Most were brought up in State and Church institutions, denied contact with their families, the use of their languages and the practice of their culture.

'Sorry Day' was launched in 1998, after publication of a report 'Bringing Them Home', by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, on the history and repercussions for the stolen children. The report concluded that not one Indigenous family had escaped the effects of the policy and that forcible removal was an act of genocide. It also made 54 recommendations including opening of records, tracing family, counselling and reparations. 10 years later, very few of these recommendations have been implemented. More about the report and its findings can be found at [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/Social\\_Justice/stolen\\_children/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/Social_Justice/stolen_children/index.html)

The first Sorry Day, held on 26 May 1998, saw some of the biggest marches in Australia's history. Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in towns and cities across the country joined in recognition of the Stolen Generations and in support of reconciliation and a formal apology from the Australian government.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia. They now number over 460,000, 2.4% of the population. Evidence of Aboriginal inhabitation goes back over 60,000 years. They suffered violence and dispossession after British colonisation and their full rights to citizenship were not legally recognised until the 1960's. Various forms of discrimination persist today.

A recent win by Tasmanian Aborigines on 15 May 2007 to have the remains of 17 ancestors returned to Tasmania from the Natural History Museum marks a significant step for the recognition of the right to human dignity for Aboriginal Australians. The remains of Tasmanian Aborigines were mainly collected in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by George Augustus Robinson who had been contracted by the colonial government of the day to clear lands by force for European settlers. The Natural History Museum wanted to carry out further tests on the remains, however the Indigenous owners mounted a case in the High Court to stop such tests being carried out. The eminent human rights barrister Geoffrey Robertson QC represented the Tasmanian Aborigines in this matter before the High Court. Tasmanian Aboriginal remains held by the British Museum were returned to them last year. The BBC 2 programme 'Museum' will feature footage of the repatriation ceremony, to be shown on 24 May at 7.30pm. For further information on repatriation issues see <http://www.eniar.org/issues/repatriation.html>

**Tristram Besterman** has been a UK Museum professional for 30+ years. He has published on and led development of museum ethics in UK for two decades. When he was Director of the Manchester Museum he oversaw the return of Indigenous remains to Australia in 2003. He was an adviser to the British Museum in 2005 on the return of Tasmanian remains in 2006. Tristram is currently member of DCMS Human Remains Advisory Service.

**Joanne Lathan** is the UK promoter for Bob Randall's film Kanyini  
<http://www.kanyini.com/>