

MEDIA ALERT

DEATHS IN CUSTODY WATCH COMMITTEE (WA)

Thursday, 10 September 2009
Institutional Racism Kills

On Wednesday 16 September, a day of action will be held as the community maintains its call for justice and action following the death of Aboriginal elder Mr. Ward on Australia Day in 2008. Following the presentation of a petition containing thousands of signatures to Hon Giz Watson MLC for tabling in Parliament (12:30pm, Parliament House), the day will culminate in a major public forum '*Institutional Racism Kills*' starting at 6pm at Perth Town Hall.

The forum will examine why – 25 years after the death of sixteen year-old John Pat in Roebourne jail in 1983, and 18 years after the publication of the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody – Mr. Ward was so badly let down by the justice system in WA, and condemned to die in custody.

“The Deaths in Custody Watch Committee believes that the state and federal governments, as well as the public at large, have a fundamental moral and international human rights obligation to ensure that Mr. Ward’s death is the catalyst for far-reaching changes to the administration of justice, not only in Western Australia, but nationally. Forum organisers are calling for acknowledgement, by the Government and the community, of the existence and impacts of institutional racism in the justice system and for action to be taken to eliminate it” said Marc Newhouse, Chair of the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee (WA).

Mr Newhouse also said “institutional racism makes some lives seem disposable, and makes the administration of justice unequal. Institutional racism needs to be acknowledged and identified, and its connections with other forms of racism need to be examined.”

“There needs to be an extended public process of community engagement to bring about recognition and understanding of institutional racism and its implications. All Australians need to be engaged in this process. We are calling on people to be part of this change’ Mr. Newhouse said.

The forum will be addressed by members of Mr. Ward’s family; 2008 Australian Human Rights Medal recipient, Les Malezer; Aboriginal Legal Service (WA) CEO, Dennis Eggington; and the Co-Founder and National Chairperson of the Committee to Defend Black Rights, Ulli (Helen) Corbett. The Committee to Defend Black Rights was one of the organisations instrumental in bringing about the establishment of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

The public forum is sponsored by Curtin University, the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee of WA and Amnesty International.

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