



MEDIA RELEASE

Worldwide knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present

Thursday, 7 June 2007

Conference commemorates 15 year Anniversary of Mabo decision

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners and native title holders must assert their sovereignty and pull together as nations to defend their land and sea inheritance, AIATSIS Chairman, Professor Mick Dodson said today.

Professor Dodson made the comments during the annual Mabo Lecture at the eighth annual Native Title conference today in Cairns.

“My argument is that we are getting slaughtered by the colonial imperative to steal our land, to strip our culture, and to demoralise us as peoples and nations. It’s about self defence – we must defend our identity and our inheritance in the land and sea,” Professor Dodson said.

“We must assert our sovereignty and, in so doing, we must prioritise the place of Traditional Owners and native title holders in our decision making processes and our resistance strategies.”

This year’s Mabo lecture comes at the 15th anniversary of the High Court decision in the *Mabo* case. Professor Dodson said government needs to get out of the way in order for Indigenous Australians to make decisions.

“We need to push governments out of our lives, to resist their cajoling and interfering, and this will require strength on our part. We need to take charge of our development. This means we need strong leadership, from men and women, young and old, city and country, all of us together. Our leaders must tackle the problems of grog, drugs, gambling, corruption and the neglect of children,” Professor Dodson said.

“We need leadership that displays courage and strength.”

Organised by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the North Queensland Land Council, the conference is being held on the lands of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people, traditional owners of the Cairns area.

The conference continues today and tomorrow.

Media: Chris Ryan, AIATSIS 0408 688 026