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# MEDIA RELEASE

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

## Indigenous people must transcend the past for better future: Mabo Lecture

Indigenous people must lead and convince the “settlers” to follow if Indigenous disadvantage is to be overcome, Chairperson of the Waitangi Tribunal and Māori Land Court Chief Judge, Joe Williams told the Native Title Conference in Perth today.

“How do we conceive of a future where the term “Indigenous” is not automatically followed by nouns like “injustice”, “disparity”, “loss” or simply “problem”?”

“The true work of our generation is to transcend history’s cruel legacy. If we do not, we doom the next generation to a ground-hog day of dispossession.”

With vision, strong identity, commitment and interdependence with non-Indigenous people, the future will be brighter, he said.

“Our vision will be about protecting our relationship with the land, rivers, mountains and seas. It will be about the quiet wisdom of our elders and the sacredness of our traditional knowledge. Different communities will seek different paths. But all must start with identity.”

Individuals and communities must be practical in their commitment to own their future and their identity, he said. Though he practiced as a lawyer working for Māori communities on land claims for many years, Judge Williams said it was not as important as his decision to “accept personal responsibility for the survival of my language in my own home”.

“Walk the talk as best you can in your own circumstances. This is important because it is the practical means by which we stop the government or courts owning more of our future than we do,” he said.

The challenge for Indigenous Australians and Māori is to move beyond the status quo of transitional justice institutions - such as native title tribunals – whose main purpose is to affirm the existing legal order.

“The ‘Yes, but’ principle keeps the game inside the status quo. Recognition of Indigenous rights is allowed but only so far as it does not undermine the existing game,” he said.

Tomorrow’s Keynote Address will be delivered by Deputy Premier, the Hon. Eric Ripper MLA from 9:00am at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre.

**Ends...**

### Media Contact

Media that want to attend the conference should register by calling Christine Ryan, AIATSIS Media and Communications m: 0408 688 026, email: [chris.ryan@aiatsis.gov.au](mailto:chris.ryan@aiatsis.gov.au)