



Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc.

MEDIA RELEASE

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OUTDATED AND IGNORANT ATTITUDES STILL EXIST

Prominent Academic and member of the Aboriginal Women's Legal and Advocacy Service in Brisbane, Professor Boni Robertson and the CEO of the Aboriginal legal Rights Movement, Neil Gillespie have expressed concern regarding the comments attributed to Andrew Bolt in the Advertiser Newspaper on 15 April 2009.

"Andrew Bolt appears to be one of those sad individuals that reflect racist attitudes that were introduced and encouraged in the Howard years. I am pleased that this type of mentality has no place in contemporary Australia," said Mr Gillespie in Adelaide today.

Mr Gillespie said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008, gave his National Apology to members of the Stolen Generations and only recently Minister Jenny Macklin proclaimed Australia is supporting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

"Where has this person been? He obviously fails to understand the genocidal and assimilation policies of yesteryear that caused so much harm to Aboriginal Australia".

"I strongly suggest Mr Bolt undertake some research and educate himself on the Stolen Generations Report and many other Reports of national significance regarding the contemporary position in Indigenous Australia before he makes such disparaging comments that are not only offensive to people he has mentioned in his article, but to all Aboriginal people" said Professor Robertson.

"I would have expected comments of a much more enlightened and higher order from Mr Bolt than the garble that he has been attributed to him in the article" said Professor Robertson.

“There is a strict set of legislative requirements that underpin a person’s right to identify as Aboriginal. Mr Bolt should familiarize himself with these requirements and then speak with Elders and other prominent members of our communities to understand just how strictly such regulations are applied,” she said.

I would have thought that Mr Bolt would have viewed the accomplishments of the people mentioned in his article in a positive light, said Professor Robertson, given Mr Bolts publicly expressed concerns in the past about the level of welfare dependency in many Indigenous communities. All of the people mentioned in the article are dignified and well respected members of our communities and it is offensive to all of our people to see them disrespected in this way.

“If it wasn’t for individuals like Larissa Behrendt, Graham Atkinson, Mick Dodson and others, the continuing and deplorable plight of Aboriginal disadvantage would not have been challenged and advocacy undertaken to address these racist policies would not have been implemented”

Mr Gillespie said “his reading of this article implies that because you have some mixed heritage then you are not Aboriginal. This is a very strange approach when Governments removed “Aboriginal” children with mixed parentage simply because they were Aboriginal or Black, although many were often fair skinned children, they were treated as black with many suffering as a result. The case in point is Bruce Trevorrow and his now famous and successful Stolen Generations Case”.

Professor Robertson suggests “the implication by Mr Bolt that Aboriginal people with a mixed heritage are benefiting is disappointing. History shows that if we rely upon governments to address the social disadvantage, institutionalised discrimination and marginalisation, then Aboriginal people would be worse off than they are even now. It is pleasing to see that our own people have broken through barriers to acquire the skills needed to help address the social concerns of our people at all levels.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with Mr Bolt to discuss the tenor of comments attributed to him in the article as we can only concede that they are either a misprint or a misunderstanding of what constitutes being Aboriginal in today’s society.

For interview

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FYI: The Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc provides legal services and associated activities (legal aid and native title legal services, financial counselling, law reform and advocacy, the Aboriginal Visitors Scheme and community education) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in South Australia. ALRM is an independent incorporated Aboriginal community organization