



Aboriginal Legal Rights
Movement Inc.

Media Release

14 May 2010

ALRM welcomes Rudd Government's Legal Aid Funding

The head of one of the nation's peak Aboriginal rights organisation has praised the Rudd government for finally making good a pre-election promise to boost funding to black legal aid.

In the 2010-2011 budget handed down on Tuesday night, an additional \$154 million over four years has been directed towards legal aid, \$34.9 million of which will be directed to strengthening Aboriginal legal aid services.

Neil Gillespie, the Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM) said the boost was welcome, although not before time.

"The legal services gap has been widening for the past 14 years," Mr Gillespie said. "Since 1996, we've had static core funding, and Aboriginal people have paid a high price for this.

"It's worth noting that in the time that our funding has decreased in real terms, incarceration rates of Aboriginal people have gone through the roof.

"So it's pleasing the Rudd government has finally honoured, after its third budget, its pre-election commitment to boost Aboriginal legal aid.

"Adequate legal representation for the nation's most disadvantaged people – in particular Aboriginal people – is not a privilege, it's a fundamental human right."

Mr Gillespie said the funding boost would assist the ALRM and other organisations to address the ever-increasing demand by the nation's most disadvantaged people for access to quality legal aid. He also said it represented a "turning point" in relations between the ALRM and government.

"ALRM has always sought a workable partnership with Government on legal aid services and in particular working in partnership with the Rudd Government in its Social Inclusion agenda.

"I think the honouring of this commitment by Labor represents a turning point for my organisation in its relationship with Government.

ALRM is excited that this leadership is also filtering into the South Australian Rann Government, with the new SA Attorney General John Rau also publicly stating his desire for an increase in access to justice for all South Australians, including Aboriginal people.”

“This significant policy shift by both governments should give Aboriginal people some hope that we may have turned the corner, at least in regard to Aboriginal legal aid in South Australia.

“I will be encouraging the Board of the ALRM to withdraw its complaint to the United Nations regarding Australia’s denial of access to justice to Aboriginal people.

“For Aboriginal people, the upcoming federal election is about three key words, - credibility, integrity and trust.

“I think we can have some renewed confidence in Mr Rudd and Attorney General Robert McClelland on this front in the face of this funding boost.”

For further information or comment please contact Neil Gillespie CEO Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (08) 8110 3700 or neilg@alrm.org.au