



TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL CENTRE INC.

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PRESS STATEMENT

Aborigines welcome ancestral human remains home from Berlin

For the second time this month, Aborigines are bringing ancestral remains home to Tasmania. They fly back into Hobart this Friday 1 August at 11.20am on flight QF1509. Delegates Tessa Atto and Nunami Sculthorpe-Green travelled to Germany to reclaim the skull of a young girl from the Charite Universitatsmedizin Berlin.

Her name was Nungarrika, from the Robbins Island tribe in the north west. She was aged about 15 when she died around 1830 near preminghana in Tasmania's north-west. Her body was brought to the attention of George Augustus Robinson who was rounding up the north western tribespeople to remove them from the region to allow the Van Diemens Land Company to occupy the land they had chosen to farm. In the early 1840s Nungarrika's skull was given to the Anatomy Institute of the Berlin University by Adolphus Schayer. Schayer had been employed by the VDL to supervise their flocks between 1831 and 1843. It isn't known how he obtained the skull or from whom, but the most likely possibility is through Robinson himself, the most infamous collector of the human remains of Tasmanian Aborigines, whom Schayer met and corresponded with during the early 1830s. As well, Schayer was in contact with Joseph Milligan, VDL Company surgeon and Ronald Gunn, police magistrate at Circular Head, both of whom also collected the skulls of Tasmanian Aborigines from the 1830s.

Ms Sculthorpe-Green is one of the many granddaughters of Nikaminik, a renowned warrior of the Robbins Island tribe who lived at the same time as Nungarrika. She spoke today about her experience:

"I understood the honour of being chosen to represent my community on this trip, and I felt the enormous responsibility" said Ms Sculthorpe-Green, "but I never anticipated how emotional Tessa and I would feel when finally we came into the room where Nungarrika was and suddenly it really hit me, that she is my countrywoman and I had come to bring her home."

Ms Atto agreed, "This trip was one of the hardest things I've ever done, and the most rewarding at the same time. To have gone to the other side of the world and carried this young girl back to her country and her people after so long, will always be one of the major achievements of my life."

State Secretary of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Ruth Langford, said the Charite Museum in Berlin had been in the forefront of repatriations of human remains from their Anatomy Department acquired in colonial times from around the world. "The German museum has been cooperative and helpful throughout the whole repatriation process in stark contrast to some English museums visited by our delegates", Ms Langford said.

Ms Langford called on the Tasmanian government to “assist our repatriation efforts by recognising Aboriginal community ownership of our own heritage, including ancestral remains, so that we can bring home more of our people still confined in overseas museums.”

The delegates visited other institutions in Vienna and the United Kingdom which still have Tasmanian human remains, to discuss their possible repatriation.

Tessa and Nunami will be available to talk to the press at the Qantas terminal.

PH: 0448 959 196 Tessa Atto

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