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NAIDOC Speech 2015

Today we gather together to celebrate NAIDOC week 2015 to share our culture, our connection to our land, tell and share our stories with the broader public. Australian's will hopefully walk with us in celebrating what makes us different as a unique people who have survived since time has begun.

We are the First Nations people of this land and have many stories of our past embedded in lutruwita, also known as Tasmania. The theme this year is we all stand on sacred ground learn, respect and celebrate.

We hope that the State's political parties not only acknowledge this important occasion but that they also act upon it. The Tasmanian Government can show real leadership enacting new legislation, which is desperately needed, to protect our peoples' stories for future generations, so that they can learn the true history of their families and communities and really appreciate their contribution to the richness of our lives today. The Tasmanian Government should also demonstrate to the world how much it respects our cultural heritage by enacting strong legislation to protect it. Our cultural heritage is fundamental to our way of life, our identity and our values and if this valuable resource is properly protected it will continue to enrich the lives of all Tasmanians and visitors alike.

Don't allow the first peoples stories to be destroyed through the greed of developers and other such money making entities. Development and advancement can be achieved in lutruwita for all Tasmanians to enjoy and participate in. It requires a willingness by the Government to insist that a proper process be adopted and adhered to at all times where the interests of our people are concerned. For example, whenever development and other proposals are in the planning stages, and will impact on any areas of interest to us as a community, it should involve us sitting at the table as equals to work through the issues to ensure the outcome is mutually beneficial.

Has the State got strong political leadership to make this happen? That is the question we must all ask ourselves at the next State election.

Premier Will Hodgman has publicly committed himself to Resetting the Relationship between his Government and the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

However, we still must go through the legal system to keep tracks closed to protect our heritage from further damage and senseless vandalism. The Hodgman Government has not shown it is really serious about getting this mess sorted out.

Hodgman's Government has not made any commitment to table any future laws to protect Aboriginal heritage in this State. Our heritage is not important to his government and is being overlooked by all the state political parties, it is a resource that is under threat, lest we forget. How much more of our history, culture and heritage does he want to destroy? It is as important as any Colonial or built heritage, but does not get the same protection European heritage gets. Why?

Will Hodgman is also our Minister as community members as he is Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and has done nothing to assist us to get our legal aid funding returned to us. The Premier could easily pick up the phone and impress upon his Federal Leader, Tony Abbott, the need to keep our legal service in our hands. He has done nothing. Silence is like a cancer, it eats away at you. Our community will not be destroyed by this decision to not fund our legal service – we will not give up and will get our legal service back into the control of our community, no matter how long this takes. This decision shows how my people are still being subjected to another government decision without consultation, regret or respect, for us as a people.

At the end of the day the Premier's Government was elected to represent us as community. The Government are the perpetrators of ongoing fear in our community and the ongoing and continuous torture of our people that has continued to plague our community since invasion of our lands in many different forms. After 200 years we have not advanced as a peoples as our Federal and State political leaders are still imposing oppression on my people today. Successive politicians have not learnt from their mistakes but merely continue to do what is best in their eyes imposing their values on my community. Politicians as decision makers impose more trauma on our people – this continues the pattern of transgenerational trauma throughout the generations and our people continue to suffer from this today.

Defunding the TAC's legal service is a political attack on community directed and controlled organisations like ours. Make no mistake, it is only the start of what is to come. So far under Tony Abbot's leadership he is against freedom of thought, speech and self-determination. That is not only a form of the oppressor keeping the oppressed in line, it is un-Australian – it is unfair.

We hope that Australian's will show that they do not want that sort of leadership either. In our democracy it is through people power that our voices can be heard in the corridors of power. Let us all make sure Abbott is not returned at the next federal election. We the people have the power to do this through the ballot box.

This week we will show all Australians our strong Aboriginal culture is alive and well. This is what makes us as a peoples different. With pride we will stand strong and tall and move forward as only we know best.