



*Lest we forget*

## ***Aboriginal Churches Partnership of Redfern and Waterloo***

### ***“THE COLOURED DIGGER ” ANZAC DAY MARCH AND SERVICE***

**April 25 2007**

#### **Report on activities in Redfern, NSW**

ANZAC Day 2007 in Redfern was an important reconciliation event in the life of our nation. This event was organised by the Aboriginal Churches Partnership in association with the Babana Aboriginal men's group of Redfern. The major development objective was to recognise, honour, remember and show our deepest respect to the Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who fought so gallantly for all Australians in all world conflicts. Through this event, many Australians came to have a better understanding of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women, who have fought courageously for Australia in all world conflicts.

These ex-servicemen and women are Australia's Unsung Heroes. Many Diggers returned home from international conflicts to a continuation of the White Australia Policy. They were not recognised in the Australian Constitution until 1967. Their bravery, service and sacrifice - always proudly recognised, honoured and respected by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities whom they represented - was barely recognised by the broader Australian community in spite of their often exceptional and sacrificial service in the defence of our country through all world conflicts.

Unlike their country, their non-Indigenous comrades in arms did respect these contributions. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, Bert Beros wrote a special poem called "The Coloured Digger." His poem has been one of the inspirations behind this project. On ANZAC Day 2006, Aboriginal church leaders and non-Aboriginal people in Redfern conducted a special ANZAC Day memorial service at Crossroads Aboriginal Ministries in Redfern. This service began the process of recognising, respecting and commemorating the memory of those brave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diggers.

After the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ANZAC Day service 2006 in Redfern, it was decided to hold another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service in 2007 in Redfern in Sydney and begin a process for designing, constructing and displaying a memorial to recognise honour and respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diggers.

A number of very significant accomplishments were achieved through the ANZAC Day 2007 event in Redfern. These accomplishments include:

- The broader community is now beginning to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people giving appropriate recognition and respect to our Unsung Heroes.
- A very successful ANZAC Day Aboriginal Diggers march was held. The March commenced at The Block in Redfern, travelled down through Redfern Street and on to St Saviour's Anglican Church in Young Street, Redfern. An estimated 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal people marched in the rainy conditions. 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women led the march.
- A very moving and culturally appropriate ANZAC Day community Church ceremony was held at St Saviour's Anglican Street Redfern. The ceremony commenced with a traditional smoking ceremony outside St Saviours and then moved inside the church for the singing of the Australian national anthem led by Warren Millera. Pastor Ray Minniecon then facilitated the commemorative ceremony, which commenced with a very moving collage of photographs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diggers. Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore gave a very inspiring and moving speech, followed by an inspiring speech by ex naval submariner, (rank) David Williams (ret.). Brenda McDonald and Linda Burney then facilitated a naming and a pool of tears ceremony. This ceremony also included a flower honouring ceremony by non-Aboriginal people.
- Warren Morgan composed a musical performance of the Bert Beros poem "The Coloured Digger." Local Aboriginal dancer, Terry Olsen who performed a very memorable dance to the song, accompanied him.
- Private Arthur Ahwang (ret) was belatedly awarded a Military Service by Federal Labour MP, Tanya Plibersek.
- A visit by NSW Governor Marie Bashir during the Church ceremony was a very special occasion.
- Other dignitaries in attendance included the Federal Member for Sydney, Tanya Plibersek MP, NSW Member for Heffron, Kristina Keneally MP, and Superintendent Mark Walton, Redfern Police and City of Sydney Councillors, Hoff, Pooley and McInerney.
- An associated "Coloured Diggers" art exhibition opened two weeks prior to ANZAC Day 2007 at the Damien Minton Gallery in Redfern. Renowned graphic artist Reg Lynch, superbly curated some 30 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists, each of whom expressed their appreciation for the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Islander Diggers to the war effort. Reg Lynch's, own artwork became the emblem and motif of ANZAC Day 2007. Included in the exhibition was a model of a memorial sculpture to Aboriginal Diggers by acclaimed Aboriginal artist and bronze work sculptor, Anthony Symonds.
- The Coloured Digger ANZAC Day 2007 event was reported in national and international TV, radio and print media allowing the important messages and

themes of the event to find their way to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and community leaders across Australia

- The event was supported by a number of community organizations. These include; Centrelink the Redfern-Waterloo Authority, the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Crossroads Aboriginal Ministries,

The beneficiaries of this project are all Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people whose family members fought in overseas conflicts. Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share this positive feeling. The broader Australian public is also now better informed about the incredible contribution and bravery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diggers. This contribution was made at a time when they were not even recognised as citizens of their own country - a country many of these people gave their life for. Since the event, many, many people from all walks of life have indicated that the march, ceremony and art exhibition created a point of greater understanding about Australia's first nations peoples within them – from which they can now embark on a longer journey of reconciliation.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. All relevant stakeholders will be invited to attend a meeting to form a committee to begin plans for similar commemorative events on ANZAC Day 2008 (meeting Agenda and Coloured Digger 2008 project outline attached).
2. Special thank you certificates will be forwarded to all those who contributed to the success of ANZAC Day 2007 event in Redfern.

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This report has been prepared by the Redfern Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 2007 ANZAC Day Working Group. For more information please contact:

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