



ACT HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION

MEDIA RELEASE

13 September, 2017

Call to Actively Promote Cultural Rights

ACT Human Rights Commission President Dr Helen Watchirs has called on local public authorities to more actively recognise and protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural rights.

Dr Watchirs speaking on the 10th anniversary of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) said: 'Australia is privileged to be home to the world's oldest continuous living culture. We have an obligation to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and respect its custodians. In the ACT we can do that by breathing life into section 27(2) of the *Human Rights Act* that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's distinct cultural rights.'

Today, to mark the 10th anniversary of the UNDRIP and raise awareness of section 27(2) of the ACT Human Rights Act, the ACT Human Rights Commission and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) will co-host a screening of the award-winning film *Zach's Ceremony* at an event at Old Parliament House from 5.20 -7.20pm.

The event will have four speakers and be chaired by Dr Watchirs. June Oscar AO, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner will speak about UNDRIP, along with newly elected ATSIEB Chair Katrina Fanning and Member Jacob Keed. SNAICC Deputy Chair Geraldine Atkinson will also speak, as the ACT event coordinates with SNAICC National Conference theme of *Bringing Them Home: Securing the Rights of Our Children*.

'The ACT is one of the few jurisdictions in the world to have brought part of UNDRIP into its local law by amending the *Human Rights Act*. In February 2016, sub-section 27(2) of the Act, reflecting UNDRIP articles 25 and 31, came into force in the ACT recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have distinct cultural rights.

'Importantly, section 27(2) creates an obligation for 'public authorities', that is ACT government agencies and other organisations receiving ACT public funding, to respect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage and distinctive spiritual practices, knowledge and kinship ties. Section 27(2) also requires public authorities to recognise and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's relationship to land, waters and other resources under traditional law.

'We've already seen some great examples of best-practice, like the Campbell High School's Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Education where culture is at the heart of learning, and ACT Parks and Conservation's the Murumbung Ranger program and appointment of Healthy Country Manager Mary Mudford. The opening of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm last week is another excellent example of bringing cultural rights to life.

'To make cultural rights meaningful and effective, the Commission is working to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to use and assert these rights. Later this year the Commission's *Respecting Culture* project will roll out resources, training and social media. We will be encouraging all ACT public authorities to engage on section 27(2) rights and take up our materials,' Dr Watchirs said.

Media contact: Deborah Nesbitt, 6205 8661 / 0451 682008