



Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) Inc.

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Reconciliation event 'promotes understanding'

June 30, 2008

The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum's weekend reconciliation celebration has promoted a greater understanding between the multicultural community and Australia's oldest cultures, chair Sam Wong said today.

An audience of about 50 at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre heard a series of speakers on the theme of reconciliation at the event, which was co-sponsored by the CMCF and the University of Canberra's Ngunnawal Indigenous Higher Education Centre. This project is proudly supported by the Australian Government's *Living in Harmony* program.

Especially thought provoking were accounts by students and graduates of the Ngunnawal Centre. Paul Collis recalled his time when, as the Aboriginal Arts Officer in Newcastle, he received invitations to attend numerous functions. "Yet when I did not have the job those same people would not recognise me in the street – that's not reconciliation," he said

Dr Chris Burke described his journey as Australia's first Aboriginal dentist and his fight to secure equal dental facilities for indigenous people in the Northern Territory. He welcomed the Federal Government's apology to the stolen generations earlier in the year. "The next step should be a permanent and lasting settlement between our peoples," he said.

The Senior Manager, ACT Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Oliver Kickett, recalled that original legal definitions of Aboriginal people placed them as part of the flora and fauna of Australia.

"Today it is not a matter of being the same but recognising and respecting each other's differences," he said.

The Director of the ACT Office of Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Nic Manikis, predicted that Australia's "great experiment" with multiculturalism would continue "despite efforts in some quarters to do away with it".

Musical interludes were provided Andrew Horne (didjeridu) and Nicolle Burt (Australian folk music).

Mr Wong said the celebration had been an outstanding success and would be repeated next year.

For further information contact Sam Wong on 0433 947 888

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