



Unveiling of “Dancing Brolgas”, a painting by Ms Barbara Sam Supreme Court, Mt Isa Monday 18 August 2008, 9.30 am

**The Hon P de Jersey AC
Chief Justice**

May I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of these lands, and at once thank Ms Sam and Mr Percy for their welcome on behalf of the Kalkadoon people.

It is a matter of particular satisfaction that I find myself in Mt Isa again. Some years have elapsed since my last visit, and the delay, I can assure you, reflected only the circumstance that the outstanding work in the Supreme Court did not warrant my supplementing the commitment to this centre of the Northern Judge, Justice Cullinane. That limitation on the work coming before this court is of course a matter for reassurance.

It was Barbara Sam's generous presentation of this painting which established a reason for my now visiting Mt Isa again, and there is in fact court work to which I will attend over the next couple of days. The presentation of the painting also established an important focus on the indigenous people of this region, and the role of the courts.

Courts of law exist to deliver justice according to law to all our citizens, regardless of individual difference. The recent decisions of the Court of Appeal in the Aurukun rape cases reflected that principle. Those decisions also, however, reflected the relevance to the criminal justice process of the level of disadvantage and deprivation which regrettably characterizes some if not many indigenous communities. A continuing unsatisfied challenge for executive government is to eliminate that disadvantage, to restore our indigenous citizens to good health, to lift life expectancies, to ensure adequate material provision, to offer employment: in short, to guarantee the provision of those things which most non-indigenous citizens are almost able to take for granted.

The mission of the courts of law is timeless, and it is also inclusive. Recognizing the fundamental significance of the work of the courts, I am as Chief Justice particularly



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pleased to acknowledge the presence here today of representatives of our indigenous citizens. Your apparent respect for this branch of government, ladies and gentlemen, is welcome and reassuring. I thank you for your support.

In the courts, we welcome your constructive suggestions as to ways by which you feel we may discharge our mission more effectively. The Murri Court, the criminal justice groups: these are good illustrations of initiatives in recent years which have rendered our processes better informed and more responsive. Streamlining those processes is a continuing issue, and as I say, as your Chief Justice I would welcome constructive suggestions at any time.

The Mount Isa Murri Court has been established as a worthy model State-wide, operating now for some six years. Its productive outcomes are facilitated by the willing participation of the elders and respected persons of the community, and for that I express continuing gratitude. I also acknowledge Lyn Roughans’ particular dedication to ensuring that court works well.

I conclude by repeating my expression of delight that this opportunity has arisen, my delight to be again here in Mt Isa, and my particular delight that I should have the opportunity to meet with you all, and especially if I may today, representatives of the Kalkadoon people.