



World Indigenous Lawyers' Conference
Banco Court, Queen Elizabeth II Courts of Law
24 June 2014, 5.30pm

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

I begin by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of these lands, the Turrbal and Jagera peoples.

I am very pleased to welcome you here this afternoon and formally to open this important Conference. I am particularly pleased that we assemble in The Gallery of the Queen Elizabeth II Courts of Law.

One of Her Majesty's strongest focuses, in my respectful assessment, has rested on the Commonwealth of Nations, which is remarkable for the diversity of its constituent members and their peoples.

The increasing representation of indigenes in professional and trade employment carries with it a reassuring growth in self-esteem, both for our indigenous fellow citizens themselves, and for our communities as a whole.

It is not platitudinous to remind ourselves that all, if so minded and appropriately equipped, should have the opportunity to take on a professional career. It is good to see foundations, scholarships and mentoring schemes in operation designed to provide further encouragement and assistance to these ends.

I have no doubt that the achievement of indigenous lawyers stands as a source of inspiration for others interested in exploring these possibilities. I hear of this in the secondary schools indigenous scholarship schemes. I have been associated with one as Patron, and I am told that participant boys returning to their communities, often remote, are very much seen as models worth of emulation.



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Personal and community achievement apart, indigenous representation within the legal profession frankly gives the profession more public credibility, just as courts are more accepted if considerations of merit allow for a diverse composition reflective of the composition of society.

We speak despairingly in this State of the over-representation of indigenous offenders in our correctional centres, the result of many circumstances, with underemployment and conspicuous lack of privilege being key. In Queensland the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service does good work, though I understand in constant need of adequate public funding. No doubt the availability of lawyers of indigenous descent greatly facilitates the work of that service: the engagement of an indigenous lawyer would ipso facto reassure, in the ordinary case, an indigenous defendant confused and daunted by a system alien to him.

It is for all these reasons that I am very pleased to support and open the Conference and to wish you fruitful deliberations, especially, if I may, welcoming visitors to our State, and to this magnificent courthouse.