



# Northern Land Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Aborigines expect full partnership in NT development

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NLC Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu, AM, today said that the Northern Territory was standing on the threshold of an era of major development – and that Aboriginal people expected to participate in the opportunities presented as full and equal partners.

“There are a number of major projects about to get under way in the NT, led by the Bayu-Undan gas project,” he said. “It is important to note that of the seven ‘major projects’ to be fast-tracked by the NT Government, five involve significant use of Aboriginal land and involve forming a partnership with landowners.”

Mr Yunupingu, who delivered the opening address at today’s first-ever Indigenous Economic Forum in Alice Springs, said the battle fought to regain traditional lands in the Northern Territory had always had a purpose: to use that land to create a future for Aboriginal people.

“Getting land back was never just about preserving the past, but always about the future as well,” he said. “That is now the job of the Land Councils – to help people do both these things.”

“We must stop the old colonial thinking – let’s have Aboriginal people work in partnership with government.”

Mr Yunupingu told the Forum that Land Councils were already engaged in this task, having approved extensive mineral exploration on Aboriginal land, facilitated community-based land management projects and been party to the successful negotiations that led to the construction of the Alice Springs-to-Darwin railway link.

“However, we could be achieving so much more. For instance, Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) money is currently spent on work-for-the-dole schemes in Aboriginal communities.”

“Why not take that money and use it to pay for resources and development to create real jobs on Aboriginal land?”

Mr Yunupingu also urged Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock to release funds from the Aboriginals Benefit Account, which currently holds almost \$70 million to promote development on Aboriginal land in the NT. He said that, on a sustainable basis, this could yield up to \$8 million per annum to fund specific land management and other development projects.

“It is extremely disappointing that a week ago the four Land Councils met with the Federal Minister and he continues to erect barriers to the release of some of this money,” he said. “The ABA money offers

Aboriginal people the chance to have a stake in development, and in partnership with the NT Government our little pot truly has the potential to create something big.”