

Speech opening Canberra Interfaith Forum Feb 10th 2013 event by ACT Indigenous Elected Body (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) Chair Rod Little.

The First Peoples of Australia have many ceremonies, songs, rituals and dance similar to those displayed by groups this morning.

My peoples, right across this continent have practiced their rituals and ceremonies for more than 50,000 years. [Imagine that]

Our spirituality embraces the creation of all things from our lands, and all things are important to Aboriginal peoples. Some may refer to this as 'the Dreaming or Dreamtime'. Our being.....

Being of the Amangu and Wajuk peoples in Western Australia, I have been taught that respect and valuing of our lands and waters; our sacred sites; languages; dance and song are all a part of our spiritual beliefs and practices, our religion if you like.

These come from our moieties, our ways of cultural practices, our beliefs and spirituality and they are still very strong today, they are held in great value and pride. It is to our survival as first peoples of Australia.

Unfortunately, those present here today may not have been able to witness ceremonial practices of the local peoples, but I have and respect and acknowledge the cultural differences to my own.

Having travelled the world I am always impressed by the cultural differences of First Peoples of the world as is celebrated here.

Within us all today are cultural and biological differences, our beliefs or religions may differ but there are some similarities, I encourage you to inquire, explore and educate yourselves as you invite others to share your faith.

I will share with you in the next few minutes my personal spiritual and cultural obligations.

As a child I recall watching my father's people's dance ceremoniously to an important time of season, which happens to be around the end of the calendar year.

As I watched in awe, slightly afraid and at the same time proud, the men painted in red and white ochre they danced for the rains to cool the warming days and to flourish the summer bush foods from the natural environment.

They celebrated and rejoiced the growth for the animals to feed on and which in turn would be healthy for hunting. They sang to, celebrate, express concerns and sat to discuss and resolve important business. Respect for each other's lands and waters; sacred sites; rules and disciplines; beliefs and cultural identity including languages, customs and kinships are guidance for us today.

These practices are still carried out in my family through the eldest who is a keeper of the knowledge and ceremonies for my families, particularly on my father's side. I close with respecting all cultures and beliefs here today.

**Rod Little,
Chair ACT Indigenous Elected Body,
Canberra Feb 10th 2013**