

JAWUN DINNER

Canberra

Noel Pearson

29 February 2012

Good evening everyone. I'm so really pleased you accepted Jawun's invitation to this momentous event today and I'm so disappointed I can't be with you.

When I discovered I could not be here tonight I urged Jawun to continue because I just think the momentum that we have built around corporate engagement with indigenous Australia is such that this important gathering we have here tonight is an opportunity that should not be delayed. It's something that I personally have been dreaming of for more than a decade now.

I cast my mind back to 12 years ago when we first engaged through my brother's organisation Balkanu with Graeme Wise from the Body Shop. We had some general ideas about how we could engage with the corporate and philanthropic communities here in Australia, because we had some latent but burning ambitions about where we wanted to take our people in Cape York Peninsula. But we felt that we could not do it by ourselves alone and we could not do it just in partnership with government. We needed the corporate and philanthropic community to join us in our ambitions.

And so, Graeme brought together two of his ex-Harvard colleagues and friends; Christopher Bartlett and Colin Carter. Christopher was at Harvard and Colin was at the Boston Consulting Group and they hooked up with Ann Sherry from Westpac and really the show started when they got together and heard our desire for an engagement with corporate Australia. We needed business in Australia to join us in our plans and to support our burgeoning reform leadership.

The first thing that Ann and Colin did was they mobilised the resources of their organisations; Boston Consulting Group and Westpac, to help us to articulate our strategies and put them into action. And they picked up the ball and we ran with it from that moment on. And over the course of the past decade, we've had hundreds of excellent people join us in our reform work in Cape York Peninsula. We've had such fantastic support from not just our two founding partners, but a range of other organisations who have joined us over the years; KPMG, IBM, Qantas and so many other organisations with good will for our plans in Cape York.

I think an important model emerged from the beginning. And that model had these elements:

Firstly, there was an indigenous community that had a reformed agenda or had at least ambitions for reform. So, in Cape York Peninsula we had a leadership, or at least a developing leadership, and we also had some basic ideas about where we wanted to head. In our case, we had a very strong view that we needed to tackle the welfare dependency of our people. We were very clear about social the problems that were afflicting our people and we wanted to tackle those problems. And we felt that our people needed to take charge and responsibility for these problems and for finding the solutions. But a very strong theme at that time was

also that we could never do it without partnership. We needed the partnership of government, and we needed the partnership of corporate and philanthropic Australia.

And so the Jawun model had those elements of indigenous leadership on the ground combined with corporate partnership. But the important thing about the corporate partnerships was that they were focussed on a particular region, a place. And the importance of the Jawun model was that it was a long-term focus. Initially there was a commitment that Westpac and the Boston Consulting Group weren't just spraying a bit of philanthropy our way, but instead they were strategically committing to a long-term support of our agenda. It became clear to me very early on that this was going to be a new model for business community engagement in indigenous affairs. There was a commitment to an indigenous community over the long-term focussing on the place, not just sailing in and out of an issue of interest from time to time, but rather doing the hard grind of helping a community get its act together. And so, more than a decade later now, I look back and I see that our partners are still with us on this reform journey and I see the progress we've made.

From the beginning, it was all of our intention to grow this model for the benefit of other indigenous communities around the country. And we were so very pleased that Jawun took the step of establishing a site with Paul and his people down at Shepperton, because it was my belief that this model of congregating a group of companies and philanthropic groups to focus on a place on a long-term basis was a model that really needed to spread to other communities around the country. So, I was very pleased when Paul and his community in Shepperton joined the Jawun partnership. And, in recent years I've just been absolutely tickled that we've now established sites in the east Kimberley with Ian and his community and the Wunan Foundation. And the most amazing achievement in my view is the partnership that has been struck with Redfern and Milly's community there. Like every indigenous Australia, Redfern is the epicentre of indigenous Australia.

And of course, I also had the great opportunity to meet a most impressive New South Wales leader, Sean Gordon, a couple of years ago. I know Sean's family, they have long been involved in indigenous political leadership in New South Wales. But what impressed me about Sean and his land council on the north coast of New South Wales, was the extraordinary attention that he displayed in relation to the governance of his local land council, and the very ambitious economic development plans. In fact, his plans for economic development are much more advanced than ours in Cape York Peninsula.

And that's the thing about these partnerships. In different areas, such as over in the Kimberley with Ian, and with Sean's work, and the real opportunities that they have with the Darkinjung Land Council, is that we in fact have a lot to learn from them. I think we've got a lot to learn about housing from Ian. And we've got a lot to learn about economic development from the mob in New South Wales. So I'm just so very excited that the Jawun model is now replicating in different parts of the country. We're getting a strong corporate interest and involvement in that replication. I'm hoping that another site that I have urged Jawun to seriously engage with is East Arnhem Land. I have a very strong relationship with the community there and I feel that they would immensely benefit from the kind of support we've received over the past twelve years.

And again I think that a Jawun site in East Arnhem Land will bring areas of strength that we could learn from, as well as for the benefit of our people in Cape York Peninsula.

The important lesson for the future is that we need strong indigenous leadership, and strong indigenous organisations to make the changes in the indigenous community. These changes won't be able to be done by government alone, they can't be done by philanthropy alone. They can't be done by our community alone. We need a partnership with those three corners.

But channelling Eleanor Roosevelt, the important thing to keep in mind here is that there is nothing that government or anybody else can do that we are unwilling to do for our own people. And we've got to keep that in mind I think. And what we've been able to achieve with Jawun's support is a strengthening of our indigenous capacity to take charge of our problems and to seize our opportunities. That's what Jawun has been most valuable in assisting us with. They've enabled us to take responsibility for our problems and to seize our opportunities. And I think that this model of tackling the predicaments and the opportunities facing indigenous Australians is ultimately the way in which we're going to get the kind of change in the circumstances of indigenous Australians that all Australians yearn for.

I'm convinced that the Jawun model is an important national model. It really is important to us in Cape York Peninsula that we have a national movement of reform. A linkage across different parts of the country, and we have this kind of scale that Jawun is currently heading towards. We won't succeed in Cape York Peninsula if our reform agenda is limited to Cape York Peninsula. I'm convinced that we will only achieve the destination that we want for our mob in Cape York if we are working in a network with reform efforts in the Kimberley, in East Arnhem Land, in the north coast of New South Wales, down on the Murray and in the centre of Sydney. And hopefully other sites around the country in the future. It is absolutely my conviction that unless we develop that kind of scale and we develop a reform movement that is connected around the country, we won't succeed with our own local plans.

And I'm just so pleased with the progress we've made in the past decade and I want to enjoin everyone from the business community here tonight and from government here tonight. I want to enjoin you in the vision that this network is definitely emerging. This network for reform is definitely emerging. The model is right. We have a growing indigenous leadership around this and it is the formula for eventual success in my view. We're going to develop the social and cultural capital of our people. And we're going to build on the strength that we have as a people. And we're also going to develop the economic capital. And to create the circumstance where mendicancy on the part of our people is not our destiny. In fact, we're going to take a fair place in this our own country. A fair place in the economy. A fair place in this very privileged country. And we're going to make a fair contribution to this country. We already are in so many areas. But the loss of the indigenous talent and the potential we've seen over too many decades now, is something that we're determined to turn around and I really want to commend the Jawun model as the best model for government, business, and philanthropic engagement with indigenous communities in charting a reform future.

So friends, I really hope you enjoy this evening. My colleagues from our participating Jawun sites around the country will be able to talk with you in greater detail about our reform agenda.

I'm again so pleased that you've all so positively responded to Jawun's invitation to attend tonight and I so regret not being with you, but I wish you all the best.