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Hundreds of leaders commit to attend Freedom Summit

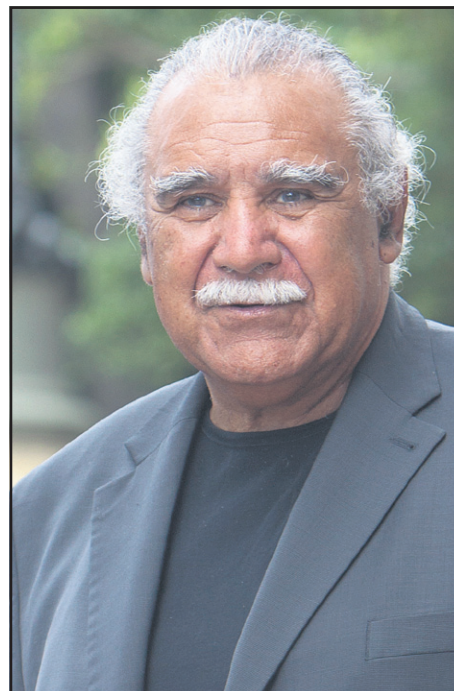
Black Power legend, Sam Watson: "We've gone from the streets to suits. We need to get back to the rights struggle"



Arrernte Elder Rosalie Kunoth-Monks: "For the first time we now have hope of a united vision to represent all our People"



Euahlayi Nation leader, Ghillar Michael Anderson: "We need a multitude of voices both women and men"



Yamatji Elder, Sandy Davies: "The suffering has gone on long enough. Our People have got it worse than ever before"



Organisers have been inundated with pledges from hundreds of First Nations leaders to attend the Summit for Freedom and are now hopeful at least 200 First Peoples Nations will be represented.

The Summit will be held on Thursday and Friday, November 27 and 28 at the historic The Old Telegraph, Mparntwe (Alice Springs). This is where Charlie Perkins, one of the most significant leaders of the rights struggle in the 60s, was born, where his mother had lived, at the reserve known as "the Bungalow". Charlie lived there until he was 10 years old.

Hundreds of leaders have told the Freedom Summit organisers they see this gathering as the opportunity to mechanise the Aboriginal rights struggle, the greatest struggle ever known on this continent, who now far too many feel fell by the wayside from the mid-1970s onwards. The overwhelming view is the Summit for Freedom represents an opportunity for First Nations People to re-establish the Black Power movement which was so effective in standing up for the rights of First Peoples.

By National Indigenous Times reporter **Gerry Georgatos**



"We have to stay big picture with this Summit," one of the Summit's organisers, Chair of the Narrunga People, Tauto Sansbury said.

"The Summit will be the most diverse and largest gathering in the one place on this continent, of this continent's First People. We need to reclaim the Aboriginal rights struggle. We need it more than ever before, because we are at the crossroads.

"If we do nothing or go the way some have with assimilation then we face the decimation of our dreams and hopes, of who we are and who we want to be.

"We have to step up now. Young and old have to come together and the Summit has to be about the big picture, about the rights struggle because all our issues can be addressed through reclaiming the rights struggle.

Support the call to give First Nations People a true representative voice. The Summit for Freedom will be held at The Old Telegraph, Mparntwe (Alice Springs) on November 27 and 28. If you want to be a part of history and attend the Summit for Freedom or donate toward meeting the cost of holding this momentous occasion, contact Tauto Sansbury on 0403 165 193 or email garridja@adam.com.au

"If we stand solid, put aside individual histories and agendas, put aside individual issues and stand solid together in big numbers without wavering, we can win the struggle.

"We have hundreds coming and they are the legitimate leaders of their people."

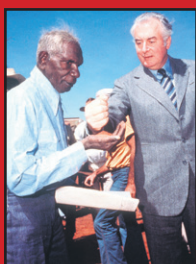
Black Power legend, Brisbane-based Murri man, Professor Sam Watson said it was time to reclaim the streets and that was why the Summit was incredibly important

for First Nations People.

Professor Watson said he supported the Summit and he would be attending as a representative of his People.

"The Aboriginal rights struggle was at its most powerful in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. We brought it to the streets where blood was spilled," Professor Watson said.

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By National Indigenous Times
reporter Gerry Georgatos



One of the Kimberley's most prominent Elders, Nyikina Mangala Elder John Darraga Watson is one of two Kimberley residents who have been named as finalists for the Western Australian leg of the Senior Australian of the Year.

Mr Watson has dedicated his life to bettering the conditions that his people live in and this is the first time there has been two Kimberley finalists for the category.

The second Kimberley finalist is Warmun Elder and artist, Lena Nyadbi who has been recognised for her continuing service to her people. There are only four finalists for the award.

Ms Nyadbi, 78 years of age, is a contemporary artist who was raised in the Kimberley. In later life, after working as a labourer since childhood, she learned the techniques of grinding ochre and charcoal and how to paint.

With the establishment of the Warmun Art Centre in 1998, Ms Nyadbi developed a reputation as an original painter. Her works have been internationally sought after.

In 2006, Ms Nyadbi was one of eight of this continent's First People featured in the Parisian Musée du quai Branly, a museum dedicated to the arts and cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas.

In 2013, Ms Nyadbi was commissioned to design a massive permanent piece for the gallery's large roof terrace. Dayiwul Lirlmim (Barramundi Scales) was inspired by her mother's homeland in Dayiwul Country and is now viewed daily by thousands of visitors to the Eiffel Tower.

Ms Nyadbi is a passionate advocate and mentor for young emerging artists and teaches the importance of Country through her art.

Mr Watson, who is also understood to be 78 years of age, is one of the Kimberley's most respected Elders and his lifelong activism has shaped the rights struggle for First People in the Kimberley.

In 1978, he captured international attention when he stood on the picket line of the famous Noonkanbah dispute – opposing the State Government supported push for oil exploration and drilling in the heart of his people's Country.

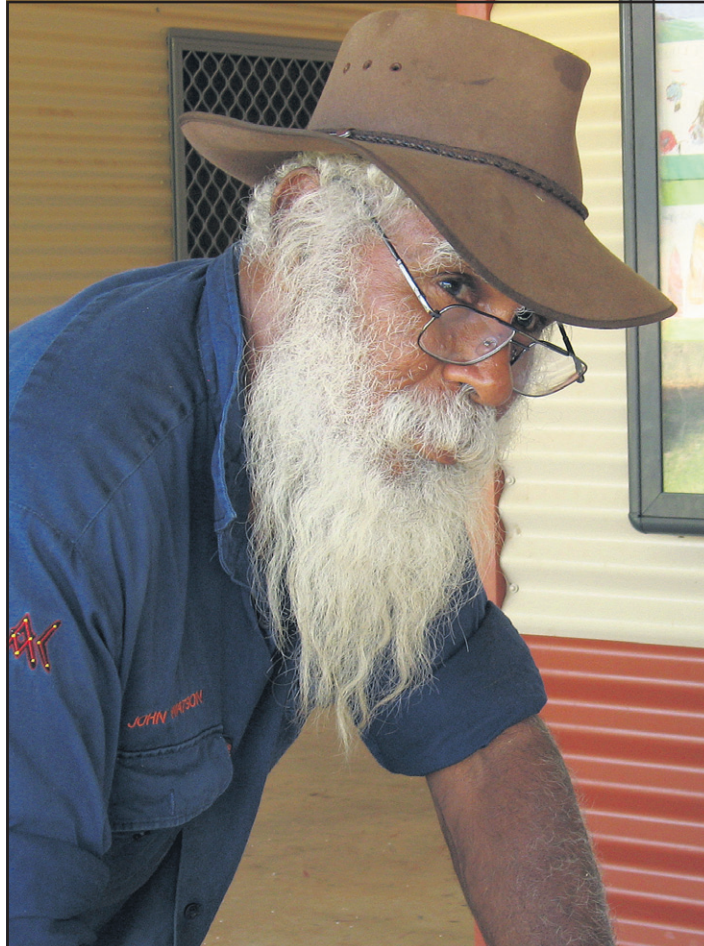
When a police convoy broke the picket line at Micky's Pool, Mr Watson was the first person arrested. His then eight year old son, Anthony, the current Chair of the Kimberley Land Council, was also arrested. Both spent the night in a police cell.

Mr Watson's inspiring leadership, his persistence and strength of character went a long way to uniting people. This coming together of people led to the establishment of the Kimberley Land Council.

He held various roles in the Kimberley Land Council including Chairperson from 1983 to 1986 and again from 1989 to 1993.

The Kimberley was one of the last regions

Respected Kimberley Elders named finalists in WA's Senior Australian of the Year Awards



Nyikina Mangala Elder John Darraga Watson

of this continent to be unsettled and taken over by the colonial invaders, often immorally described as "settlers".

Some of the worst frontier wars were in the Kimberley, with only a hundred years ago a period of bloodshed known as the "Killing Times".

Today the Kimberley suffers from the impacts of the brutal dispossession and of the subsequent apartheid endured – with the highest homeless and suicide rates in the nation. To help the troubled youth Mr Watson was one of the founding members of the Yiriman Project.

As the driving force behind the now famous Project, Mr Watson reconnected vulnerable youth with their Country and Culture, generating positive social change. As an artist,

author and cultural storyteller, Mr Watson has strived for the right for his people to "walk in both worlds."

Mr Watson is not certain of his year of birth, most probably 1936 but until 9 years of age he was a child labourer. He only escaped the welfare and the Stolen Generation because his family fled "into the bush" where they lived for years until it was safe to return.

From 1948 to 1959 he was a station worker for pastoralists on land he would one day own. Two thirds of the Kimberley's pastoral lands have been returned to First Peoples after the Indigenous Land Council bought them with government grants.

Mr Watson owns Mt Anderton station, where he once toiled as a station hand and head



Warmun Elder and artist, Lena Nyadbi

stockman. In 1983, on Mt Anderton he set up the remote community of Jarlmandangah, 350 kilometres north of Broome.

After leading the Noonkanbah resistance in 1978 against the AMAX oil drilling company and the State Government, he worked alongside others in immediately founding the Kimberley Land Council.

"Culture is important, it is who we are. We must always remember who we are, we must always know our Country, we must always speak our language. We must be strong in who we are, so we are strong in the worlds that are out there," Mr Watson said.

"If we are strong in ourselves, we will be alright, our children will be alright, their children will be alright."

Organisers inundated with pledges from leaders to attend Summit for Freedom

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"But despite everything that did come out of that period between 1972 and 1975, I also see that time right now as a turning point when we as a People turned away from the rights struggle.

"Too many of our people went from the streets to the suits," Professor Watson said. "We need to get back on to the streets, we need to fill the streets. We need to spill a little more blood. We need to finish the job.

"I think the Freedom Summit will be confronting for Federal, State and Territory governments.

"Wherever you get our mob together in huge numbers, we can be formidable."

Another Black Power legend, Head of State of Euahlayi Nation, Ghillar Michael Anderson said unity was the imperative.

"I will be there at the Freedom Summit and so too will a delegation from the Sovereign Union of First Nations and Peoples in Australia," Mr Anderson said. He spoke about the need for a multitude of voices to be heard at the Summit for Freedom without personal agendas and without egos but of the Aboriginal body politic – where "both women and men are heard".

One of the continent's most powerful voices, Arrernte Elder, Rosalie Kunoth-Monks has also declared her support for the Summit for Freedom.

"Our people will be in Alice Springs for the Freedom Summit," Ms Kunoth-Monks said. "I really feel for the first time in a long time we now have hope, that this is a united vision by our People and not some band of so-called leaders chosen by politicians.

"It is so important the heart of Aboriginal People and the heart of Aboriginal lands are represented. I look forward to the gathering because it will be free of external agendas and controls, because it will be led by the First Nations," Ms Kunoth-Monks said.

"It is up to us too, not just those who have brought us together, to get the message out to all our communities. The Northern Territory communities will be there because of the hurt, because of the aching, because of the trauma we have suffered and we continue to suffer.

"For the First Nations of the Northern Territory this gathering will be a beacon for us to come and put on the table the reclaiming of the rights struggle. We will put on the table the lines of action that we have to take."

Chair of Geraldton's Regional Aboriginal Medical Service, Yamatji Elder, Sandy Davies said a Yamatji delegation of 10 would attend the Freedom Summit.

"There'll be ten of us. We will be taking a delegation to represent our region, our People. We will be taking our senior Elders and our politically and community driven people," Mr Davies said.

"It's time, it's long overdue. We have all stopped wondering what's going on with self-appointed so-called leaders. We have to draw a line in the sand at long last and just get somewhere.

"There will be no trouble for this Summit to get in excess of 300 of the true leaders. I think government and the nation will be surprised by the numbers. There are a lot of very unhappy Aboriginal people in this country.

"The suffering has gone on long enough. Our People have got it worse than ever before, nothing has got better, the most marginalised are marginalised more so than ever before," Mr

Davies said.

The Freedom Summit will be held on the last Thursday and Friday of November 27 and 28.

"We must remember the core message of this Summit. This is about our freedom and this can only be delivered by us," Mr Sansbury said.

"We must reclaim and restore the Aboriginal rights struggle and then keep the faith, stay solid, get to the streets.

"This is about forcing governments to listen to us, not us listening to them," Mr Sansbury said.

"If we have more than 300 leaders in Alice Springs, no-one can question us, no-one can turn away from us, no-one can continue to walk all over us.

"More than 300 leaders present in the one place will mean that at least 700,000 of our 800,000 People in this continent will be represented.

"This Summit is about our voices and our right to determine who we are. If we reclaim the Aboriginal rights struggle then through this we will have the power, Black Power, to end the heartaches, to end the suffering, to end the racism, to pack away all the terrible issues, all the terrible social ills that hurt our people.

"It is the only way because every other way has not only failed us but is destroying us.

"Walmadany Tent Embassy stared down the Western Australian Government and the Woodside-led joint venture over the gas hub and won. Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy has been staring down privateers and profiteers and is winning. Imagine what could be achieved if all our People came together as one, imagine what we could achieve," Mr Sansbury said.