



## MEDIA RELEASE

23 October 2009

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### **Sydney's inner city 'urban warriors' honoured**

#### **Mick Mundine and Col James recognised with lifetime achievement awards**

Two of Sydney's most prominent Aboriginal rights activists and social housing advocates were today honoured with lifetime achievement awards.

Michael Mundine, CEO of the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), and Colin James AM, Director of the IB Fell Housing Research Centre at the University of Sydney, were presented the awards at a special ceremony by Her Excellency, Governor Marie Bashir.

Mr Mundine and Mr James are both members of the Australasian Housing Institute, which hosted the event at the Redfern Community Centre, in the heart of inner-Sydney's Aboriginal community known as the Block.

The Institute's CEO, Joan Ferguson, said both men had made incalculable contributions to housing Indigenous people, the homeless, squatters and other disadvantaged groups over the past four decades.

She said they had both been central to establishing, running and fighting the battles of Redfern's AHC – the first housing collective in Australia. "We believe their brand of principled activism is necessary for a healthy housing system," Ms Ferguson said.

"Col James has recently retired from his teaching position at the university and we wanted to do something special to recognise the enormous amounts of time and energy he has given to social housing causes over the years.

"He has been a major champion for the poor and the dispossessed – with a single-minded fixation on the needs of impoverished and socially marginalised tenants.

"And of course there can be no overstating Mick Mundine's tireless leadership and work on behalf of Redfern's Aboriginal community. Their unique 35-year partnership on the Block is a cause of inspiration and celebration."

Colin James, who today also became the inaugural recipient of a Lifetime Membership of the Institute, said his long-time friend and collaborator had been enormously successful in taking the AHC through its many challenges.

"I admire Mick greatly," Mr James said. "The Redfern community are not exactly easy to work with, there are factions, and Micky has steered a very good course between them by building strong connections.

“Importantly, he holds the awe of young kids – he is tough, he was a great sportsman, he is his own man. Mick is also very respected by all our stakeholders and is rightly regarded as a legend by the whole community.”

Mr Mundine, who is currently pursuing a grand urban renewal plan for the Block, said Col James “is like a big brother to me.”

“There are not many people who give their heart and soul to Aboriginal people and other disadvantaged people,” Mr Mundine said. “The Lord put some people here for a reason – and we got Col – he’s just been a blessing.”

Mr James’ ‘retirement’ promises to be an active one. He continues to serve as a key consultant to the AHC and has played a central role in developing the proposed master plan for the area.

*The Australasian Housing Institute is the professional association of people working and volunteering in the social housing sector across Australia and New Zealand. The Institute represents those who work in paid and voluntary positions in public, community, Indigenous and supported housing services; in tenancy advice, housing policy and housing research.*

*Members of the media are cordially invited to attend the celebration. Please RSVP to Kelly Badewitz at [admin@housinginstitute.org](mailto:admin@housinginstitute.org) or 02 6494 7566.*

**When:** 11.30am - 2.30pm, Friday 23 October

**Where:** Redfern Community Centre, 29-53 Hugo Street, Redfern

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