



Indigenous leader Noel Pearson abused by elders during Brisbane speech

By Francis Tapim
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Indigenous leader Noel Pearson has accepted an invitation to meet with elders in Brisbane after some of them launched a scathing attack on him during a public lecture.

A day after he delivered a stirring eulogy at former prime minister Gough Whitlam's memorial service that drew national praise, Mr Pearson was sworn at and criticised during his speech at the Queensland Conservatorium on Thursday.

Mr Pearson was delivering the Sir Paul Hasluck Foundation annual lecture, where he called for changes to the constitution to empower Indigenous people.

However, a few members of the audience interjected and began criticising his views on Indigenous responsibility, saying he did not represent the views of Aboriginal people.

Mr Pearson said his views were his own and he never spoke on behalf of anyone else.

"I have never claimed to speak on behalf of anyone but myself," Mr Pearson responded to one of the attendees.

But a man replied: "You do every time you open your mouth - you speak [that] you are chosen to speak on behalf of black people. You have got no right to do that - stand there like a big strong black man - you're not a strong black man, no way in the world."

Local Indigenous leader Sam Watson invited Mr Pearson to discuss his opinions with elders today.

"The equation seems to be very lopsided as a great number of your views are, so the onus always appears to be placed on Aboriginal people and as a member of the Aboriginal tent embassy we would invite you to join us up there on the lawns of Musgrave Park and have a robust discussion as Aboriginal people," Mr Watson said.

Mr Pearson said he was pleased to accept Mr Watson's invitation.

"I'm going to tell you my version of self-determination is one that is based on the power of responsibility," he said.

"I want Indigenous people to take back the responsibilities that have been taken away from us, so thank you for your invitation."

Mr Pearson said he stood by his views.

"My argument, which has not been understood by Indigenous Australians, is that when I argue for responsibility - I argue for power," he said.

"Because when you're accorded responsibility, you are saying 'I want to be in charge here ... I don't want to be passive'."