

Age

# Blacks putting case overseas

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By MARK METHERELL

An Aboriginal group has established an international network to tell the world of its civil rights battles in Australia.

In less than two years, the group, which will not give details of financing or membership, has set up an organisation with offices in London and Amsterdam, six "support committees" in five other European countries, and reciprocal arrangements with North American Indian groups.

A founding member of the group, Mr Gary Foley, said yesterday the campaign had its first significant coup last week. He said the threat of world displeasure forced the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, and seven other Ministers, to spend four hours in an unsuccessful attempt to dissuade Aboriginal leaders from going to the UN on the Noonkanbah issue.

Mr Foley, a director of the Aboriginal Health Service in Melbourne, said the overseas network copied propaganda tactics from southern African and Palestinian liberation groups.

"We felt that by going overseas we could get a far fairer hearing with less bias and misconception. Now we have enormous support," said Mr Foley. "We started telling people overseas 'This is what Mr Fraser says about southern Africa, but here is what it is like for the indigenous people of his own country'."

Commenting on the moves, the chairman of the Aboriginal Advancement League in Melbourne, Mr Graeme Atkinson, said yesterday the overseas drive had resulted from the lack of interest in Aborigines shown by many local institutions.

"The other thing is that the

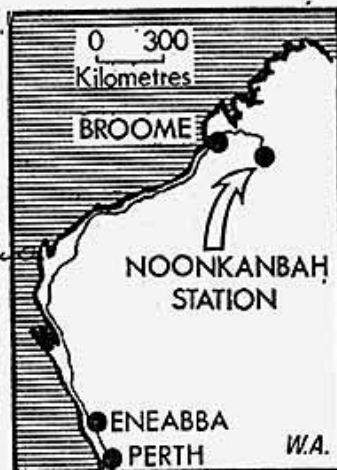


image projected overseas of Australia by the Government is that everything is rosy here as far as the treatment of the indigenous inhabitants", said Mr Atkinson.

The chairman of the Victorian Aboriginal Land Council, Mr Jim Berg, said: "Our efforts overseas have paid off. As far as I am concerned, the National Aboriginal Conference was a paper tiger until last night. Now it has come of age."

Mr Foley said there were now two committees in West Germany promoting the issue as well as groups in Denmark, France, Austria, Holland and Switzerland. The groups are largely connected with church and youth organisations.

He said the Swiss committee, with support from the London group, would provide help when delegates of the National Aboriginal Conference put the Noonkanbah case to the Geneva meeting of the UN sub-committee on the elimination of racial discrimination.

Mr Foley said the international network had no connection with the NAC and preferred to keep details of its membership and financing "covert".

"We expect that the Government, sooner or later, will have to try to neutralise us and render us ineffective. We are being very cautious about what we say," said Mr Foley.

He said all funding for the network came from overseas. An undisclosed "world-wide agency" contributed four return air fares a year for Aboriginal campaigners to visit Europe. Other anonymous

donors financed the full-time office in London and a part-time bureau in Amsterdam. The organisation shared facilities in Europe and the United States with Indian civil rights groups. The group planned to establish links in the Middle East and Africa later this year, and next year in Latin America.

Mr Foley said the first significant indication of the strength of the international campaign came this week in the Noonkanbah talks.

He said the NAC meeting with the Government was "unprecedented in Aboriginal history".

The Prime Minister said after the meeting that the reaction of overseas countries should not be "the determinant of what we do here". A former South African academic said yesterday such a reaction was reminiscent of South Africa's response to criticism from world leaders, including Mr Fraser, of its apartheid policies.

Dr Colin Tatz, professor of politics at the University of New England, said: "White South African constantly says it cares not a damn what the rest of the world thinks about apartheid. . . nevertheless South Africa has been forced to react to what those nations say and do."

Professor Tatz described the NAC's decision to go to the UN as "terribly significant". "If they get organisation status at the UN we could see the beginning of what South Africa has been enduring since 1946 . . . it is a first step, from that, it is a kind of point of no return," said Professor Tatz.

## No company spokesmen

PERTH. — The West Australian manager of Amax, the company that wants to drill at Noonkanbah, has no contact with the media.

Yesterday 'The Age' requested in writing the co-operation of company representatives in Noonkanbah. The letter was transmitted to the United States and a reply returned three hours later.

It said: "Amax does not have any representatives in Noonkanbah who can act as company spokesmen. If you have any questions you can submit them in writing at this office for answers."