

## **GOVT RESTRICTS MIRRAR ACCESS TO UNESCO MISSION**

**October 20, 1998**

The Mirrar people today accused the Howard Government of attempting to exclude them from crucial aspects of a high-level UNESCO investigation into the impact of the Jabiluka uranium mine on the Kakadu World Heritage Area.

The mission will arrive on October 26 and spend one day with Traditional Owners before meeting with industry, government and other groups in Kakadu, Darwin and Canberra. The mission will decide whether to recommend

Executive Officer of Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, Jacqui Katona said today:

"The prime focus of UNESCO's visit to Australia is to examine how Traditional Owners will be affected by the Howard Government's decision to allow the Jabiluka uranium mine to proceed within the Kakadu World Heritage Area.

"However, the Australian Government is refusing to allow Traditional Owners to meet with UNESCO once the mission leaves Kakadu. The Traditional Owners will have no opportunity to counter any of the arguments put to UNESCO by ERA, the Northern Territory Government, the mining industry or the Commonwealth - all of whom are in favour of the Jabiluka mine proceeding. Basically, we are being stitched up.

"The UNESCO visit is a rare opportunity for a United Nations organisation to examine how the Howard Government treats Indigenous people. It should be acutely embarrassing to all Australians that Traditional Owners are to be actively excluded from the 'business end' of this investigation. The Government knows that the UNESCO mission will be compiling their report while in Canberra and is seeking to ensure that Aboriginal people are absent during this crucial phase," said Ms Katona.

The Australian Government has also refused to grant the Mirrar access to meetings between the UNESCO mission and pro-mining groups while insisting that a pro-mining Government representative attend meetings between UNESCO and the Mirrar.

"If the Australian Government wants to play these sort of games we are inevitably heading for a major diplomatic incident," Ms Katona concluded.

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