

# 2015 Opening of the Legal Year

continues to be a high-point for the legal profession

The historical occasion of the Opening of the Legal Year has succumbed to increasing pressure and growing caseloads, with Courts now sitting without break over the usual Christmas recess. Despite this the Opening of the Legal Year continues to be an important event for the Territory legal community as in Darwin over 150 and in Alice Springs over 70 members of the legal community attended. The Society continues to mark this occasion as it provides an important opportunity for the profession to come together and to contemplate the core values of a legal system and a just society and in 2015 the Society welcomed Mr Julian Burnside AO QC as the eminent speaker.

The Chief Justice spoke about 2014 and looked forward to 2015. Extracts from this speech are below.

The profession and the judiciary were joined by the Mayor of Darwin HH Katrina Fong Lim and also the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly HH Kesia Purich MLA. Unfortunately the Attorney General was unable to attend however the Society acknowledges his support of this event. All present were enchanted by Julian's passion and consummate skill in weaving these questions together. In Alice Springs the lively debate continued well into the night.

Julian took the profession on a contemplative path discussing – 'what is justice?' Against a back-drop of cuts to legal aid Julian re-told stories about the treatment of Asylum seekers that had galvanised him to action. Many were moved by his stories of conditions in immigration detention,

and the damage it causes to people incarcerated there. Julian also spoke about ASIO powers, and the injustice of being prohibited from knowing the nature of the decision and testing it in Court. Julian's experience of Alice Springs also brought with it questions about the root cause of indigenous disadvantage reflected in alcohol abuse and shameful incarceration rates in the Northern Territory.

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It is remarkable that the opportunity presented by these events, to contemplate the important role the legal profession plays in society continues to have relevance. Julian called those present to consider that a legal practitioner has a duty beyond merely acting on instructions in the interests of a client, or interpreting laws handed down by legislators. Julian called practitioners to acknowledge that they have an obligation or even a duty to respond to injustice wherever it is found. ●



