



Australia's Neighbour Day to be discussed at the United Nations next week

The development of Australia's Neighbour Day and its success over the last six years in bringing Australians closer together will be discussed by founder Andrew Heslop at the United Nations in New York next week.

Mr Heslop has been invited to speak at a conference on the care and protection of the vulnerable and elderly, using Neighbour Day as a model, on Thursday 22nd May 2008.

After New York he will travel to Paris for European Neighbours Day on Tuesday 27th May.

The invitation follows a letter to (former) Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2006 seeking the UN's support.

"The opportunity to have dialogue with the UN is a welcome step for a simple initiative which encourages us all to develop better relationships with our neighbours and to protect the elderly and vulnerable who live around us," said Mr Heslop.

"Everyone, everywhere is a neighbour and we must do all we can to encourage tolerance, respect and understanding in order to build stronger, healthier and more vibrant communities.

"I am honoured the UN has extended this invitation and I am looking forward to my first visit to the United States," he said.

Heslop, 38, is a four-time Australian of the Year nominee and former National Communications Manager for Australian Red Cross who founded Neighbour Day in Melbourne, Australia in 2003 when an elderly woman was found dead in her home. She had been there for two years, forgotten by neighbours, friends and family until Victoria Police broke in and discovered her remains. Remarkably all of the utilities (water, electricity, gas and telephone) remained connected despite the accounts not being paid for two years.

"In 2006 former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pledged the UN's support to developing Neighbour Day worldwide, with the concept of the day also supported by President Clinton and HRH The Prince of Wales," said Mr Heslop.

"For the first time this year Neighbour Day also received the personal backing of every Premier, the Chief Minister of the ACT and the Lord Mayors of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide. They were joined by local councils and shires across the country who ran local promotions and events encouraging residents to get together.

"Now steps are in place for Neighbour Day to become an official UN Observance Day which could lead to an International Year of Neighbourliness being declared, and this will be part of my discussions next week.

"If that occurs, it would be a remarkable achievement for a concept that was first raised as a Letter to the Editor of The Age in 2003," he added.

Neighbour Day is always held on the last Sunday in March every year (Sunday 29th March 2009)

For more information visit www.neighbourday.org

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