



Australia missing at global meeting in Paris

A global conference of national Neighbour Day organisers will go ahead in Paris this week without representation from Australia.

"I am disappointed that sponsorship to attend the conference could not be found, it would have been enormously beneficial for communities all over Australia," said Andrew Heslop, the Australian founder of Neighbour Day.

"Despite contacting the Prime Minister's office for assistance, direct contact with airline chief executives and an appeal through the media I have advised the organisers I cannot be there on Thursday and Friday.

"Representatives from Qantas, Cathay Pacific, British Airways, Singapore Airlines, Emirates, Etihad and the Virgin Group were all very gracious in advising they could not support an urgent trip. Almost all of them have sponsorship budgets locked away more than 18 months in advance.

"My personal contact with the CEO's to seek their consideration has certainly opened doors for Neighbour Day because many of them were already aware of Australia's annual celebration of community.

"After funding Neighbour Day from my salary and savings for nine years I simply couldn't meet the costs of a last-minute trip after earlier telling organisers I couldn't be there. But a week ago they asked me to urgently reconsider and to do 'whatever it took' to get to Paris.

"It is unfortunate I cannot go. Representing Australia at the conference would have been a great honour," Andrew said.

After speaking at the United Nations in May 2008, Andrew was a guest of European Neighbours' Day and participated in celebrations in Paris, the base for operations and activities in 30 countries.

In May this year he received the Westpac Prize for his development and promotion of Neighbour Day in communities across the country, the first ever award for the day.

It has gained the endorsement from world leaders including Prince Charles, Bill Clinton and Kofi Annan. In Australia, Neighbour Day has been backed by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Premiers, Chief Ministers, Lord Mayors and other political and community leaders.

Founded in 2003 in Melbourne, Neighbour Day has five principal aims –

1. Strengthen communities and build better relationships with the people who live around us.
2. Create safer, healthier and more vibrant suburbs and towns.
3. Promote tolerance, respect and understanding.
4. Break down community barriers.
5. Protect the elderly, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

www.neighbourday.org

FOR MEDIA INFORMATION ONLY

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