

BALI BOMBING MEMORIAL ADDS POIGNANT HIGHLIGHT TO DARWIN WAR AND DISASTER CONFERENCE

11 October 2012

Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) held its first "War and Disaster" conference at the Darwin Convention Centre in 2010. The event focuses on the many and varied demands and crises faced by the hospital not only from local events but also from its Asian neighbours.

This year's conference, held in the first week of October, had the added poignancy of marking the 10th Anniversary of the Bali bombings in which the RDH, together with Bali's Sanglah hospital played a remarkable role in attending to the hundreds of people injured in the nightclub blasts of October 12, 2002 - in which 200 people, including 88 Australians, were killed.

To commemorate the occasion, John Howard, the Prime Minister of Australia at the time of the bombings, was the guest speaker at the Welcome Gala Dinner of the conference which raised funds for the Sanglah hospital.

The "War and Disaster" conference is an initiative of, and is organised by, Darwin's National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre (NCCTRC) which was established following the Bali bombing in 2004 with the encouragement of the people of Darwin, funded by the Australian Government and well supported by the NT Government, as Mr Howard reminded his dinner audience, and has since developed close ties with Bali's Sanglah Hospital.

The former Prime Minister also told the audience the legacy of the event has resulted in closer ties with Indonesia, saying "the fight against terrorism has been more successful in our part of the world than many predicted at the time."

Mr Howard paid particular tribute to the staff of the RDH for their treatment of those injured in the bombings. "The response was a triumph of what I think can be described as the gentle efficiency of Australians when faced with a great crisis," he said.

The conference, which attracted 200 delegates, was noteworthy for the involvement of a number of eminent speakers in the sessions on relevant crisis matters. Notable among these was Dr Len Notaras who spoke at the opening session of the conference on his experiences during the aftermath of the bombing. Dr Notaras was recruited as Medical Superintendent of RDH in 1994 and held that position while playing a central role in the success of the Bali bombing operations. He also played a central part in the establishment of the NCCTRC and now fills the pivotal role of Executive Director of the Centre. His contributions to the RDH and his trauma work have been recognised with several professional and academic awards in addition to the Order of Australia in 2003 for his work in the Bali Assist Response.

Dr Notaras was joined by several of his senior colleagues and associated medical specialists, including 2004 Australian of the Year, Winthrop Professor Fiona Wood AM, and Dr Wayan Sutarga, President and CEO of Sanglah Hospital.

The conference was followed by a Public Forum and panel discussion involving Professor Clare Martin, Chief Minister of the NT from 2001 to 2007, Dr Ian Norton, NCCTRC Director of Disaster Response, Julian Burton, burns victim survivor and founder of his eponymous Burns Trust, and Sally Sara, senior ABC Foreign Correspondent. A video message from the Governor of Bali, Mr I Made Mangku Pastika was also shown.

Darwin Convention Centre General Manager Malu Barrios said the Convention Centre had been very pleased to welcome the "War and Disaster" conference in 2010 and 2011 but that it had been a particular privilege to host the 10th Anniversary conference this month.

"As a committed member of the Darwin community, it is especially satisfying for the Centre to have the opportunity to support and promote the awareness and interests of the city and its benefits and assets - particularly The Royal Darwin Hospital in which we all take so much pride," said Mrs Barrios.

For further media information or comment, please contact:

Mr Peter Sawyer

Sawyer Public Relations Media Consultant to the Darwin Convention Centre

T: + 61 417 626 605

E: peter@sawyerpr.com.au

www.darwinconvention.com.au

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