



Date: 11th of February 2019

ANIC endorsement of Special Screening

“BEFORE 1770” – the Muslim presence in Australia

In April 2018, twenty-one Muslims from Sydney Australia travelled to North Eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. The purpose of the travel was to learn about the long and respectful relationship between the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land (Yolngu Clan) and the Muslim Macassans from Sulawesi Island in Indonesia. This connection, which entailed trade, marriage, exchange, and sharing, existed since the 1500s long before European presence on this continent. According to Professor Regina Ganter of Griffith University, “That Macassan contact predates the arrival of the British on the Australian continent is not disputed.”

Shaykh Wesam Charkawi, an ANIC Member who headed the group, produced a short-film documentary entitled ‘Before 1770’ and is travelling across Australia to screen the film in major cinemas.

Shaykh Wesam Charkawi said, “We are constantly being told to go back to where you came from and that Muslims don’t belong here. This has an adverse effect in terms of belonging and increases hostility towards minority groups. It is therefore incredibly significant and empowering to learn that our religious ancestors had a strong connection with the first nations people of this land, extending back to the 1500s and possibly further.”

The Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) endorses projects which serve a benefit to the entire Australian community. This project draws a spotlight upon Australia’s vast history and the long connection Muslims had with the Aboriginal Yolngu Clan of North Eastern Arnhem Land. This historic relationship is significant to the Australian Muslim Identity allowing Muslims to draw strength from such a relationship and realise that Islam is no stranger to the first peoples of this land. ANIC and the Muslim community commends the great work and effort in producing this short-film documentary.

Aboriginal people have been on this land for some sixty to eighty thousand years and are the world’s oldest continuing culture.