



August 4, 2005

Paul Lucas

Minister for Transport and Main Roads

Warren Pitt

Minister for Communities, Disability
Services and Seniors

**WORLD LEADERS PUT DEMOCRACY UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT AT
QUEENSLAND'S FIRST UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE**

Some of the world's most powerful – and powerless – people will share the world stage in Brisbane when Queensland hosts its first-ever United Nations conference next week.

Former Irish president Mary Robinson, Timor-Leste Foreign Minister Dr Jose Ramos-Horta and key UN staff will share their experiences with international delegates who have worked with some of the most marginalised communities in the world.

More than 1500 delegates from 30 countries will attend the United Nations International Conference on Engaging Communities, being held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre over four days from August 14.

Transport and Main Roads Minister Paul Lucas and Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors Warren Pitt said the conference marked the first time that the United Nations had directly joined with a state government on a major event.

Minister Paul Lucas said the conference outlined hundreds of examples where communities had found a voice for themselves, at global and neighbourhood levels.

“Community engagement is about how communities and government work together to make decisions,” Mr Lucas said.

“This conference shows the worldwide trend for people to have a say in the decisions of organisations that affect their interests,” he said.

Mr Lucas said events in our very unstable world drove home the benefits of knowing about democratic institutions in different parts of the world.

Minister Warren Pitt said Queensland sought to make community engagement a part of the daily business of government.

“That is why the United Nations has brought this important international conference to Queensland,” he said.

“Queensland has already received international recognition for its leadership in implementing an integrated and multi-level approach to involving people and communities in the business of government.

“The government has taken up the challenge of community engagement through Regional Parliament, Community Cabinets and Ministerial Regional Community Forums.”

Major conference highlights include:

- ◆ A democracy panel of leaders, including Dr Ramos-Horta, Mrs Robinson, UN Assistant Secretary-General on Economic Development Jomo Kwame Sunduram and Queensland Premier Peter Beattie.
- ◆ The announcement of the United Nations Brisbane Declaration on community engagement;
- ◆ A mock UN Security Council session;
- ◆ Specialist sessions targeting poverty-reduction, HIV/AIDS prevention in the Asia-Pacific region and indigenous and environmental issues.

The conference will also feature a major international trade exhibition.

UN Under-Secretary-General Kim Hak-Su said the conference provided a platform for governments and key stakeholders to address issues including globalisation, democratisation and the growing demand for people-centred development.

Major conference sponsor BHP Billiton applauded the decision to hold such a conference in Brisbane.

Ian Wood, BHP’s Vice President, Sustainable Development, said it brought worldwide concerns to the Brisbane stage.

“We are proud to be the platinum sponsor of the conference, which provides a forum for dialogue on engaging communities in the global context,” he said.

Griffith University Pro-Vice Chancellor (Equity and Community Partnerships), Logan Campus Professor Sharon Bell praised the conference as “a well-conceived and perfectly timed initiative as engagement with communities emerges as a key priority for many universities”.

Mr Lucas said the conference marked an unparalleled opportunity for communities to interact with leading international thinkers.

“The Brisbane Declaration being formalised at this conference will also shape debate at a major UN conference on reinventing government in New York in July next year.”

Media inquiries: Paul Childs, Paul Lucas’s office, 3237 1942 or 0407 131 654.
Ruth Evans, Warren Pitt’s office, 3235 4286 or 0408 701 379.