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NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian ‘so disappointed’ by Australia Day protests

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Premier Gladys Berejiklian says she was disappointed by the “invasion day” protesters who burned the national flag and clashed with police on Australia Day.

Outside Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Ms Berejiklian said there were more appropriate days to debate the issue of whether Australia Day should be celebrated on January 26, and ways to demand change.

“We have a democracy and everybody has the right to protest but today’s about everything that brings us together,” she said.

“I’m so disappointed that people couldn’t express themselves in a more appropriate way on such an important day for our community.”

The Willoughby MP would not give a date for her impending cabinet reshuffle, saying “I’m here to celebrate Australia Day and talk about that today”.

She then headed into the arts centre where community leaders, local MPs and Australians recognised today for their services and achievements had gathered, including South Sudanese child soldier-turned-Blacktown lawyer Deng Thiak Adut and Olympic pentathlon champion Chloe Esposito.

Ms Berejiklian, just three days into her job as NSW Premier, told the diverse crowd the people of western Sydney valued respect and hard work, “and I can’t think of two greater values that make us more Australian”.

Standing in front of both the Australian and Aboriginal flags, she acknowledged the tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal history and said everyone should feel proud.

She spoke of her parents’ move to Australia in the 1960s.

“I don’t think they would have thought, when I was four, that their daughter with a surname like Berejiklian would one day become the premier of NSW,” she said, generating applause and cheering from the crowd.

“What I love about NSW is that it doesn’t matter where you come from, or what your background, if you sign up to be an Australian citizen and support our community, you can achieve anything.”

She remembers her own parents’ citizenship ceremony, telling Fairfax Media: “It was

the early '70s; I remember the day because I was allowed to have pink lemonade!"

In Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra, hundreds of people at "invasion day" rallies chanted "always was, always will be Aboriginal land".

They called for the date of Australia Day to be changed, as January 26 was the day their land was invaded, the "beginning of all their troubles".

A NSW police spokeswoman said a 20-year-old man was being questioned about what was an "isolated incident in an otherwise peaceful demonstration".

Earlier, NSW Governor David Hurley acknowledged the pain and mixed emotions the day brings for Australia's Aboriginal people.

"We understand on this day 229 years ago the coming of the First Fleet wreaked a terrible impact on your people, your families, your culture," he said.

He said the 1967 referendum to include Aboriginal people in the census was the beginning of an unfinished journey to equality.

"Like everyone here and everyone around Australia, I am keen for the work that started in 1967 to be completed sooner rather than later, in whatever form it takes."