



# National Council of Churches in Australia

17 August 2010

For Immediate Release

## Statement on impending visit by the WCC Living Letters team *from the National Council of Churches in Australia*

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) welcomes the decision by the World Council of Churches (WCC) to send an international ecumenical delegation to visit the Indigenous Peoples of Australia from 12-17 September 2010.

The visit is in response to an invitation extended by the NCCA with the view to shed light on the human rights situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to show solidarity with the Indigenous people who feel their voices are not heard. The focus of this visit will be the impact of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER).

The invitation to the WCC was extended following a forum held in 2009 by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) of the NCCA. This forum brought together Indigenous Church leaders from around Australia to discuss the Australian Government's NTER. The aim of the forum was to show solidarity with Aboriginal people in the NT, and to formulate a common response and plan for action. A key recommendation arising from that forum was to ask the NCCA to extend an invitation to the WCC to send a Living Letters team to visit the Northern Territory.

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and challenges in overcoming violence and in peace making, and to pray together for peace in the community and in the world

A Living Letters team previously visited Australia in 1981 to assess the situation for Aborigines. They travelled around the country for three weeks and met with a wide number of individuals, communities and organisations. The 1981 report of this visit reflected the concerns, hopes, dreams and aspirations of Aboriginal people as heard by the Living Letters team. The report gave guidance to the Churches and hope to Aboriginal people. The independent and objective points of view were valuable to take to Government to highlight what was observed and the areas where Australia needed to do better.

From this our relations with Indigenous people have improved with better co-operation and representation within Churches. It is our hope and prayer that a similar outcome can be achieved by a contemporary visit, particularly in relation to the NTER. The NCCA and NATSIEC have consistently expressed concern, along with Church leaders and other organisations, since the inception of the NTER. However, despite legitimate concerns being raised by many groups the NTER has continued unabated. General Secretary of the NCCA, Rev Tara Curlewis said about the visit "We feel that there is an urgent need to shine a light on the impact of the NTER on Aboriginal people. We welcome the arrival of an international and neutral team to listen, learn and bear witness to the situation for Aboriginal people in the NT".

For more information: <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation/preparatory-process/living-letters-visits/australia.html>  
[www.ncca.org.au/natsiec](http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec)

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