

**16 March 2010**

*from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC)*

**NATSIEC Urges Senators to Stand Up for the Rights of Aborigines**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) urges Senators to vote against the Bill currently before them on Welfare Reform and Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act.

Despite the Senate Committee Majority Report indicating support for the Bill the overwhelming majority of submissions to that inquiry showed there are serious concerns about the Bill.

NATSIEC does not support the idea that we should pass faulty legislation and hope to sort it out later. We must ensure that legislation is passed which ensures the rights of all Indigenous Peoples are fully protected immediately. The faults that are apparent in the proposed legislation should be addressed before it is passed in the Senate.

“Good legislation is one that is well thought out and well researched. There is enough evidence for the Government to get this legislation right now. Why do we always have to put up with bad policies and bad legislation?” said Graeme Mundine, Executive Secretary of NATSIEC.

While the proposed Bill does provide better protection than is currently available under the NTER, it does not go far enough. As it stands the bill will not fully reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act and, as the Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples found, Australia will continue to breach the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and will also contravene International Human Rights Conventions.

“This is not a choice between faulty legislation and no change. There is a third way - the Government can negotiate amendments to ensure the full reinstatement of the RDA and the full protection of the rights of Aborigines in the Northern Territory.

I urge Senators to stand up for the rights of Aborigines and to negotiate improvements to the Bill before it is passed,” Mr Mundine concluded.

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