

Indigenous MAKE POVERTY HISTORY.

MIPH Newsletter

31st March 2009

In This Issue

Take Action
Impacts of the Intervention
Letter from CERD
ABS Schools report
AIHW report Indigenous Health
Australian Reconciliation
Barometer



MIPH is an initiative of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) which is a commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA).

Quick Links...

[Our Website](#)



[CLICK HERE](#)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Dear supporter,

This week it is expected that the Government will formally support the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. NATSIEC congratulates the Government on this welcome, and long over due action. We believe that this Declaration will be one more step in the right direction to ensure that Indigenous rights are not only recognized but also protected in this country. The next hurdle will be to identify and rectify discrepancies between the principles of the Declaration, domestic law and Government policies and practice.

Meanwhile, The Government continues to press forward with the Northern Territory Intervention, but NATSIEC still has serious concerns about its impact and effectiveness. Last week the Government also released the NT intervention "report card". The report certainly lists some impressive achievements: 1696 jobs, 76 community stores, 63 additional police, police station upgrades, night patrol services, school nutrition programs, safe houses, new crèches, and more Government Business Managers. The report leaves no doubt that there is still a commitment to, and concerted effort by, the Federal Government in the NT.

However, the report fails to "report" on the beneficial outcomes of this concerted effort. Is the situation improving? The Government has consistently failed to provide meaningful comparison data - there are no benchmarks and there are no comprehensive goals against which to measure progress. How many children have been saved from abuse? How many women have been saved from violence? How many people have had measurable improvements in their health, wealth or social well being?

The problem with not providing these measurable outcomes is that we just don't know how it is going. There is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest massive failures; we receive daily reports from all quarters about the failures of the Intervention and its negative impact on people's life. But we also hear stories from those who have benefited and who think the intervention is great. Hearing about these personal experiences is important and highlights the fact that a "one size fits all approach" will not work, that people and communities have particular needs which must be addressed at that individual level. However, we also need to know more than the lived experience; we also need to know what the measurable outcomes are? Without these facts it is impossible to know what is working, what should be continued or expanded and what should be consigned

to the scrap heap.

There is a framework already in existence to guide the Government in providing appropriate goals and benchmarks; it's called the Millennium Development Goals. These are seen largely as a foreign policy issue for Australia. Something we should push other "poorer" countries to take on. Not so, these MDGs are about poverty reduction, Aborigines live in poverty; therefore the MDGs are as relevant to Indigenous Australians as they are to impoverished Africans.

In fact, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues call on "developed countries to adopt national processes to implement the Goals with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples within those countries" (E/2006/43). The intention of the MDGs was always that they should be taken and adapted to the country situation. For all its faults and exclusions the MDG framework is a valuable tool that can be used by the Australian Government to put meat on their data bones and to ensure that the resources being directed to the Northern Territory, and elsewhere, are having the expected and much needed results.

Take Action

Action: Write to The Hon. Jenny Macklin
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Parliament House:
Suite MG 51
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Tel: 02 6277 7560
Fax: 02 6277 4122
Email: Jmacklin.MP@aph.gov.au

Congratulate the Government on their support for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Congratulate the Government on their continued effort towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, particularly in the Northern Territory.

Ask the Government to improve their performance reports by:

- Including benchmarks when they report on activities undertaken in the NT emergency response - what was the starting point?
- Identifying what is needed to bring the situation up to an acceptable level - ie how many houses are required to reduce overcrowding. How many safe houses are needed to ensure women have a place to turn to? How many Real jobs are required?
- Identifying what has been the outcome from the intervention activities. I.e. how have the safe houses impacted on the violence women and children experience. How many people have moved from CDEP or welfare to real jobs? What are the real impacts of income quarantining? How many children are in school, and staying in school?

Impacts of the Intervention

Intervention is hurting health - Sydney Morning Herald, March 31, 2009

The Sunrise Health Service covers 112,000 square kilometres of the Northern Territory east of Katherine and is at the frontline in dealing with the health parts of the intervention. All but one community within its area are subject to the intervention's measures, including welfare quarantining.

Sunrise has compared data collected before and since the intervention and the results are dispiriting.

Anaemia is an iron deficiency that leads to poor growth and development, and as such is an indicator for the general health of children. Since the intervention, anaemia rates in the area have jumped significantly.

In the six months to December 2006, 20 per cent of children were anaemic. A year later the figure had increased to 36 per cent, and by June last year it had reached 55 per cent, where it stayed in the last six months of 2008.

Now, more than half the area's children face big threats to their physical and mental development. In two years, 18 months of which was under the intervention, the anaemia rate nearly trebled.

There is also a worrying rise in low birth weight among babies. In the six months leading up to the intervention, 9 per cent of children had low birth weights. This rose to 12 per cent in December 2007, and to 18 per cent six months later. By the end of last year, it was 19 per cent, double the figure at the start of the intervention.

Since compulsory income management of welfare payments began in the region in late 2007, there have been documented instances when it affected people's capacity to buy food. This included diabetics, who with no local store access were unable to access food for weeks at a time. Their response to this situation was to sleep until food became available.

Income management has not reduced alcohol or drug consumption - indeed, alcohol restrictions on prescribed communities has merely shifted the problems to larger towns or bush camps. And it has not stopped "humbug" or the conversion of Basic Card purchases into cash for grog. There is also no evidence that it has increased the consumption of fresh food among Aboriginal families, which is vital to fighting anaemia.

There was strong agreement about the need to protect women and children from violence and to improve the socioeconomic position of Aboriginal families between those who designed and welcomed the intervention and those who questioned its methods.

The key criticism from those of us asking questions was why all the evidence of what is known to work to make communities safer and to improve education and health was ignored in favour of expensive, untried, top-down, heavy-handed policy approaches.

On Friday, the Government is expected to endorse the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, along with the national apology to the stolen generations, another symbolic shift from the Howard government's indigenous policy. But there are still striking similarities between the practical approaches of the former government and the present.

Nowhere is that clearer than the continuation of the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act, the right to appeal to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and the right to seek redress under the Northern Territory anti-discrimination legislation.

The suspension of the right to seek redress have left those people

subject to welfare quarantining with no avenues of complaint if they feel unfairly treated. And there are more reasons to be concerned about continuation of the intervention without reflection on what is working and what is not.

While the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, has said she is relying on conversations with some people about the need to continue without reviewing the policy, the evidence on the ground - like that from Sunrise - suggests it is time for the Government to seriously rethink the mechanisms it is using in the Northern Territory, especially around welfare quarantining.

There are two challenges for the Government over its indigenous policy. The first is to make it compliant with the standards it supports in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The second is to make real its promise that it will be led by the evidence of what works rather than ideologies that don't. Both challenges will lead to more positive steps to addressing the socioeconomic disparity experienced by Aboriginal communities and the issues of protecting women and children that has been the justification of the intervention.

Professor Larissa Behrendt is the director of research at the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology, Sydney. Irene Fisher is the head of the Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation.

Letter from the CERD to Australia

Her Excellency Mrs. Caroline Millar
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations at Geneva

Chemin des Fins 2
1218 Grand-Saconnex

13 March 2009

Excellency,

The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination appreciated the open and constructive discussion which took place on Wednesday 25 February 2009 between representatives of the Australian Mission and the Working Group on Early Warning and Urgent Action

Procedure on the issues raised before the Committee in relation to the Northern Territory Emergency Response. The Committee also acknowledges the written information received from the Australian Mission in this respect.

The Committee's attention has been drawn to reports according to which measures being implemented to achieve the objectives contained in the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) have allegedly led to serious discrimination against Aboriginal persons in certain communities of the Northern Territory. The Committee notes with concern that the Racial Discrimination Act was suspended as a necessity to enact the measures contained in the NTER.

However, the Committee, taking into account information received from the State party, observes that the current government, in consultation with indigenous communities affected by the NTER, is in the process of redesigning key NTER measures in order to guarantee their consistency with the Racial Discrimination Act. In this regard, the Committee recalls article 2.2 of the Convention according to which,

"States parties shall, when the circumstances so warrant, take [...]"

special and concrete measures to ensure the adequate development and protect of certain racial groups or individuals belonging to them, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. These measures shall in no case entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate rights for different racial groups after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved."

In the light of the above, and in order to continue a constructive dialogue with your Government, the Committee requests the State party to submit further details and information on the following issues no later than 31 July 2009:

- . Progress on the drafting of the redesigned measures, in direct consultation with the communities and individuals affected by the NTER, bearing in mind their proposed introduction to the Parliament in September 2009.
- . Progress on the lifting of the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act.

The Committee welcomes the government's commitment to building a new relationship with Indigenous Australians based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and responsibility.

Allow me, Excellency, to reiterate the Committee's wish to pursue a constructive dialogue with your Government, and to underline that the Committee's request for information is made with a view to assisting your Government in the effective implementation of the Convention.

Yours sincerely,
[signed]

Fatimata-Binta Victoire Dah
Chairperson of the Committee for the Elimination of Racial
Discrimination

YARRABAH SPIRITUALITY RESEARCH MUST INFORM HEALTH POLICY AND PRACTICE

Aboriginal health programs must incorporate spirituality if they are to have any sustainable impact on the current state of Indigenous health according to a report being launched in Queensland's largest Aboriginal community of Yarrabah which investigates the relationship between spirituality, religion and health. The report, *The Role of Spirituality in Social and Emotional Wellbeing Initiatives: The Family Wellbeing Program at Yarrabah*, is one of two new discussion papers from the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health.

http://www.craah.org.au/publications/downloads/DP7_FINAL.pdf

ABS releases schools report

Apparent retention rates for Indigenous full-time school students, from Year 7/8 to Year 12 were much lower than for non-Indigenous full-time school students (46.5% and 75.6% respectively), however the Indigenous rate rose by 3.6% in comparison to 2007, while the non-Indigenous rate was unchanged.

In 2008, there were 151,669 Indigenous full-time school students, an

increase of 3.0% or 4,488 students since 2007. Almost 59% of these students attended schools in Queensland or New South Wales.

There were 22,731 Indigenous full-time students in senior secondary schooling (Years 10-12), across all states and territories in 2008, compared to 15,585 in 2003 - an increase of 45.9%.

Ref: ABS - 4221.0 Schools

Latest Report in NT Indigenous Health

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has released a report which they say details both significant health improvements and challenges for the Northern Territory's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Report entitled "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2008 report: detailed analyses" says:

- Risky alcohol consumption rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Territorians are lower than in all other jurisdictions except Tasmania;
- The mortality rate for NT Aboriginal babies has decreased by about 26% since 1997;
- Immunisation rates for NT Aboriginal children are now higher for all age groups than in other jurisdictions;
- Life expectancy for Aboriginal women in the NT is 65.2 years, compared to the Australian Indigenous average of 64.8 years;
- Rates of avoidable mortality in Aboriginal Territorians have declined significantly between 1991 and 2006.

Australian Reconciliation Barometer

Trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous People is low. Only 12% of Australians have a high level of trust for Indigenous people and only 11% of Indigenous people have a high level of trust for non-Indigenous people. 64% of Non-Indigenous people reported trying to advance reconciliation in the previous year, but only 20% said they knew what to do to help disadvantaged Indigenous people. Conversely, 99% of Indigenous people said they had taken steps to advance reconciliation in the past twelve months and 82% knew what to do to help Indigenous people.

Ref: <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-resources/australian-reconciliation-barometer>

[Forward email](#)

Email Marketing by

✉ **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to grussell@ncca.org.au by grussell@ncca.org.au.
[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).



NATSIEC | Locked Bag 199 | Sydney | NSW | 1230 | Australia