



NATSIEC

Indigenous MAKE POVERTY HISTORY.

MIPH Newsletter

9th June 2009

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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...

To see an online version of this newsletter [click here.](#)

[Our Website](#)



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Website - A reminder!

Our apologies if you have experienced problems linking to pages on our website

Dear all,



Last week, NATSIEC hosted a forum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Church leaders to discuss the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) also known as the Intervention. The aim of the Forum was to develop a common voice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Church bodies and to develop a common platform for action.

The meeting was attended by NATSIEC members and included representatives from the Salvation Army, the Churches of Christ, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC), and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). Also attending the meeting were representatives of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Alliance (NATSICA) and the Evangelical Alliance (EA). NATSIEC also invited people from the Northern Territory to help inform our discussions and were pleased that Bishop Greg Thompson, the Anglican Bishop of the Northern Territory, Mrs Didamain Uibo, an Aboriginal educator as well as Dr L. Lee Levett-Olsen, the Principal of Nungalinga College in Darwin were able to attend.

We met over four days and focused our attention particularly on the Northern Territory Intervention. The key areas of concern were the lack of proper negotiation with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and the lack of voice given to many community people. An additional area of concern was the discriminatory nature of the Intervention.

The forum participants also discussed the role that Churches can play in the Northern Territory and more generally on issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples around Australia. There was agreement about the importance of Churches actively engaging in these issues and being a prophetic voice for justice for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. There was also strong support to encourage Governments to learn from Churches, as the common experience is that Churches and their agencies have largely been ignored in the roll out of the Intervention. This is despite the fact that they are present in communities across the Northern Territory and have a long history of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This tradition continues today where Churches and their agencies are major providers of many community services in education, health, welfare and other areas.

While there were many examples spoken about where Churches have taken a lead and provide models for successfully working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, there are still areas where Churches too can increase their effort. These areas are reflected in the Forum statement.

from this newsletter.

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, several of our pages became corrupt in recent weeks and kept dropping links.

The NCCA is currently upgrading its website, and we are taking this opportunity to update the content.

Over the next two months, or so, the website will be pared back as we remove items in preparation for the new site. If anything disappears that you need, please email Gabrielle at grussell@ncca.org.au and I can email it to you.

We'll let you know when the new improved version appears!

The Forum was a great success and resulted in a strong statement of common purpose. The fact that the forum brought together participants from a wide range of Churches and their representative bodies was greatly appreciated. The strength of such gatherings was acknowledged and NATSIEC was encouraged to continue to organise such forums.

NATSIEC is committed to working on the outcomes of this forum and, together with NATSICA, have committed to organise a Church Forum later in 2009, in the Northern Territory. This will be part of our ongoing commitment to ensure that the issues facing those impacted by the Intervention are understood amongst our members and the wider Church community and to highlight areas where the greatest advocacy is required.

The Forum statement is below and can also be downloaded from www.ncca.org.au/natsiec

Statement on the Intervention from the NATSIEC Forum

NATSIEC Forum on the Northern Territory Emergency Response Forum Statement - June 2009

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians, we strongly believe that the Creator gave us our identity as well as this land and the wisdom to care for it. We recognise that there are many issues to resolve as a Nation, one of which is the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER - the Intervention). We believe that, in its current form, the Intervention does not and will not work for Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal Peoples have a right to be involved at all levels and stages of developing just and right solutions for community issues. Policy development needs to be driven by Aboriginal Peoples and developed with respect to Aboriginal ways. Appropriate protocols must be followed to ensure that negotiations have the agreement and guidance of Traditional leaders. Policies that are implemented from a central government body without proper negotiated partnerships will not lead to practical and sustainable outcomes.

We believe that Aboriginal Peoples have not been listened to and our stories have not been heard. The Intervention was implemented without consultation with Aboriginal Peoples and Government continues to fail to listen with respect and in a manner which is culturally appropriate. Further, we do not believe that 'consultation' will lead to just and right outcomes for Aboriginal Peoples in the Northern Territory or elsewhere. Rather, we assert the right of Aboriginal Peoples to negotiate agreements as equal partners who have the right to make their own decisions. We resist any attempts to return to a paternalistic mind set where Governments, or Churches, tell us what to do. Aboriginal Peoples have fought against such injustices in the past, and we believe that blanket responses and policies, such as the Intervention, are as disempowering as were those protectionist days. As a nation, we need to support Aboriginal Peoples to work on solutions that lead to positive outcomes. Government must respond to individual community needs and urgently establish much needed services particularly in the areas of health, housing and education. Government must negotiate agreements which respect the right of Aboriginal Peoples to take responsibility for achieving negotiated outcomes.

We have a particular concern about the discriminatory nature of the Intervention. We know that many Aboriginal people have experienced shame and humiliation due to discriminatory measures such as income quarantining. We strongly assert that all Intervention measures must be based on a human rights approach and address Aboriginal poverty and discrimination. There is never a case for suspending human rights and all Government policy must be in accordance with the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) (RDA) as well as human rights principles, such as those contained within the United Nations' Universal

Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge that the Government has committed to reinstating those sections of the RDA which were suspended, however, we make the observation that this must happen as a matter of urgency and that the legislation must fully reinstate all the provisions of the RDA.

In addition to the protection of the laws of this nation, we also believe that Aboriginal Peoples have God given rights in this land. We believe that Government and Churches should nurture and give greater recognition to the strong spirituality of Aboriginal people. The spirituality which sustains us, gives us resilience and without which transformation cannot endure. Dehumanising policies and attitudes that deny and damage this spirituality and that contribute to a loss of identity, culture and land will not lead to sustainable change. This can only be achieved when the strong Aboriginal spirit is restored, when the rights of Aboriginal Peoples to determine their own future is asserted and when Aboriginal world views are respected and affirmed by Governments and non-Indigenous people.

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians, representing many different denominations and backgrounds, we are united against the NT Intervention in its current form. We stand in solidarity with our Northern Territory brothers and sisters and we send messages of hope to them.

We call on Governments to:

- 1.1 Learn to respectfully listen.
- 1.2 Recognise the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to negotiate agreements with governments. We stress negotiation as distinct from consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about the implementation of policy and programs which have already been developed and decided on.
- 1.3 Ensure that appropriate protocols, as determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, are followed in all negotiations and interactions.
- 1.4 Recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the right to negotiate in their own languages. To ensure that Governments, and their agencies, learn local languages and understand the nuances of the different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and the importance of accurate translations. Governments can learn from Churches who have also come to recognise the importance of learning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
- 1.5 Rectify the lack of negotiation to date with regard to the NTER by urgently facilitating a "negotiation forum" in the Northern Territory to address government policies and programs. Aboriginal Peoples will control and set the agenda of this forum, the purpose of which is to:
 - 1.5a Bring Aboriginal Peoples together from across the Northern Territory.
 - 1.5b Allow a diversity of Aboriginal voices to be heard, including those community people who are connected on the ground as well as those who are representing organisations.
 - 1.5c Develop a position on an appropriate policy response to the issues facing Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.
 - 1.5d Agree to appropriate protocols.
 - 1.5e Agree to an appropriate methodology that recognises and affirms the diversity of Aboriginal ways of meeting, making decisions and developing processes.
 - 1.5f Ensure that Governments are negotiating with spokespeople who are

true community voices, elected and endorsed by the communities they are representing and especially include the voices of the Traditional owners.

1.6 Acknowledge that compulsory income quarantining is discriminatory and to recognise that if the policy is as beneficial as is claimed then it must be applied to all those on welfare, irrespective of race.

1.7 Explore more positive ways of managing income such as providing education programs on income management and budgeting. Education is a far more effective and less discriminatory tool and we ask the Federal Government to identify models of best practice from the many successful programs that have been developed to achieve this end. To implement these programs there will be a need to use Aboriginal teachers and to pay appropriately for language training. Further development of this policy agenda should come from additional funding and not from the already committed budget.

1.8 Learn from success. Look at what is already working, learn from mistakes and develop models that build on proven successful strategies. The Churches, for example, can provide a good model of how to work together. We are all different and have different cultures and ways of worship; still we can all work together.

1.9 Be accountable for the words that Governments use. For example, when the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs makes statements such as "as human beings we all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect" the Government must be held accountable for those words and can not at the same time implement discriminatory policy.

1.10 Immediately reinstate all the suspended provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act (1975).

1.11 Ensure that the principles of the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are enshrined in Australian Law.

We call on Churches to:

2.1 Encourage their congregations to be a prophetic voice and effectively and actively pray for:

2.1a Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their leaders.

2.1b Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Churches and Ministries.

2.1c Injustices and Human Rights.

2.1.1 We encourage the Churches to increase the effectiveness of their prayer by developing a deeper understanding of the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. One way in which this can be achieved is by inviting local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Church leaders to speak. We also encourage Churches and their congregations to put their money and feet (actions) where their prayers (mouths) are.

2.2 Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, churches and ministries to create a platform for engagement and to facilitate the education of congregations to increase their understanding and awareness about the real issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as well as suggested solutions and directions.

2.3 Actively promote positive and successful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at all levels of Churches.

2.4 Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to link and

integrate all aspects of ministries and services within, and between, denominations to maximise the effectiveness of all arms of the Churches' ministries and agencies.

2.5 Be accountable to any covenants, policies or partnerships that have been negotiated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and ensure ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of such initiatives.

2.6 Increase support and resources for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative Church bodies to enable them to continue to build their capacity and ability to respond to matters of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as well as to continue and strengthen their ability to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples from all denominations together to work with a common purpose and voice.

2.7 Work with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative Church structures to use Church resources to effectively influence media to tell true stories and to also highlight the positives. Use all available means and networks, both national and local, including radio, newspapers, newsletters, internet etc.

2.8 Make a commitment to provide national support and resources for Northern Territory Churches. The resource burden of adequately addressing the issues in the Northern Territory should be shared by other States and Territories. Practical support in funding now will go towards rectifying the lack of adequate funding over the past forty years.

2.9 Work with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative Church structures to develop and fund a Church forum in the NT with the aim of bringing together Church leaders, Aboriginal people and their Church leaders and representatives, from all denominations, to develop a united commitment to work towards National and State policy changes.

2.10 Request the World Council of Churches to organise a "Living Letters" visit to the Northern Territory.

2.11 Work with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative Church structures to appoint a national coordinator to monitor the NTER on behalf of all Churches. Also encourage each congregation to support a person or group to monitor the NT Intervention and to liaise with the national monitoring coordinator.

Endorsed by the members of:

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Alliance.

From the Human Rights Commissioner

Final stage in consultations for a new national Indigenous representative body

Late last year, the Australian Government invited the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner to convene an independent Steering

Committee to develop a preferred model for a national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In March, the Steering Committee convened a national workshop in Adelaide to identify the key elements of a new national representative body. Consensus was reached at this workshop on a range of issues but further consultation and discussion is needed to address four outstanding issues: how the body can best represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a way that includes local and regional issues; what should be the structure of the national representative body; what should its relationship be with Government and the Parliament; and how should it be funded.

The Steering Committee is required to present a preferred model to the Australian Parliament by July 2009 and to recommend an interim body for establishment from August 2009.

The following information is designed to help you have your say in developing a new national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Please answer the [online survey by 10 June](#) and/or provide a written submission by 24 June.

Submissions can be made using the online form at www.fahcsia.gov.au

Submissions can be emailed to indigenousrepbody@fahcsia.gov.au or posted to National Indigenous Representative Body Unit, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, PO Box 7576, Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610.

From the news wire...

CONFUSION SURROUNDING COMMUNITY LEASING ISSUE

The Central Land Council said that a petition of 443 people at Hermannsburg west of Alice Springs calling for direct negotiation with the Australian Government over leasing is a reflection of the confusion surrounding the issue and the pressure put on Aboriginal people over the community leasing issue. CLC Director David Ross said the CLC has facilitated Northern Territory and Australian Government involvement in leasing discussions at Hermannsburg.

FIRST ABORIGINAL OUT-OF-HOME CARE SERVICE TO RECEIVE FULL ACCREDITATION (NSW)

Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Child and Family Network will become the first NSW Aboriginal out-of-home care agency to achieve full accreditation through the NSW Children's Guardian Quality Improvement Program. Minister for Community Services Linda Burney today presented representatives from Ngunya Jarjum with a certificate of accreditation at a special lunch held at Parliament House, Sydney. Ngunya Jarjum, which operates from Casino on the NSW North Coast, provides support to children and young people in out-of-home care.

TIMEFRAME FOR ALICE SPRINGS TOWN CAMPS (FED)

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin announced on 24 May 2009 that the Australian Government was taking the first step towards compulsory acquisition of the Alice Springs town camps. The Australian Government Solicitor has advised the Government to extend the period during which people may provide submissions about a possible acquisition to 60 days. The time for receipt of written submissions has

been extended to 28 July 2009. The revised timing means that if the Minister decides to give a notice under subsection 47(1) of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act (2007), the notice would take effect no earlier than 4 August 2009.

NUNGA COURT CELEBRATES ITS 10TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY (SA)

Having heard more than 5000 cases since its first inception, the Nunga Court at Port Adelaide today celebrates its 10th anniversary. Attorney-General Michael Atkinson says the court, which aims to create a venue that is less intimidating for offenders and their families, was the first of its kind in Australia. We wanted to design a court that recognised the integral role of the family and the community in the lives of Aboriginal people and this has resulted in an extremely successful and effective format over the past 10 years, Mr Atkinson says.

TERRITORY HOUSING NO SILVER BULLET (FED)

The CLC says that vilifying Tangentyere Council for not signing the lease deal offered by the Australian Government is unfair and doesn't recognise the social complexities associated with Aboriginal housing. The fact that Alice Springs town camps have such poor infrastructure and chronic overcrowding is not Tangentyere Council's fault - it is the fault of successive Commonwealth and Territory Governments which have drip fed them for years while millions of dollars of Commonwealth Grants funding to the Territory has been shamefully squandered, CLC Director David Ross said. What people do not recognise in this entire debate is that it is not just about houses and sewage pipes. Solving town camp problems is complex and simply not possible without the active involvement of town camp residents.

COMMUNITY- BY-COMMUNITY - THERE WILL BE CHANGE: BOYLE (QLD)

Mayors from 14 Indigenous communities, Ministers, State Members of Parliament and senior government officers met in Cairns today and vowed to work in partnership to create jobs, houses and economic development opportunities. Local Government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Minister Desley Boyle and Community Services and Housing Minister Karen Struthers listened to the Mayors and committed to action - community-by-community.

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank TEAR Australia for signing us up to their news service for free. <http://www.tear.org.au/>

2009 Martung Upah Appeal



The Make *Indigenous Poverty* History Campaign is an initiative of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC). Other projects run by NATSIEC include the Indigenous Theology project and a development fund.

NATSIEC receives significant funding from Act of Peace and the Uniting Church (NSW) 2% fund, however the rest of our funding comes from Church donations and donations to its annual appeal Martung Upah*.

By supporting the Martung Upah appeal you are joining us in a partnership to engage Churches and the wider community in fostering a deeper understanding

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Together we can work towards healing the hurts of the past and building a better tomorrow for all our children so that injustice and discrimination will not be part of Australia's future.

We thank you for your support.

To download go to the Martung Upah Appeal webpage and to make an online donation [click here](#).

* Martung Upah is from Western Australia and means partnership.

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