



CHRISTIANS for an ETHICAL SOCIETY

Working Group of NSW Ecumenical Council
Associate Member of ACT Churches' Council Inc

President - Rev Gregor Henderson

The Hon Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I write with regard to matters related to the Northern Territory Intervention.

Christians for an Ethical Society (CES) promotes social justice issues through public forums and our September speaker was Graeme Mundine, who is the Executive Secretary of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Council (NATSIEC). His very powerful talk was informed by a recent visit he made to the Northern Territory in the company of a team from the World Council of Churches (WCC). They had been invited by NATSIEC and the National Council of Churches of Australia to come as a 'Living Letter' to the Aboriginal Peoples of the Northern Territory.

They had the opportunity to assess, at first hand, how the Intervention is tracking. What they found was extremely disturbing.

- At every single place the team visited it was told life is worse under the Intervention.
- The team was told about previously functioning community initiatives that had been completely obliterated under the Intervention, either through lack of funding or through being taken over or subsumed by Government.
- The Intervention sought to implement a predetermined policy agenda which communities were expected to approve. It is a one size fits all formula that negates empowerment and support of Aboriginal people to make decisions about their own lives.
- The hurt that has been left by the Intervention will take a long time to heal. Many told the team how they felt they were being invaded and being treated like criminals when they saw the army and police taking over their streets.
- The Government is refusing to provide services to homelands or outstations in spite of clear evidence that living there promotes better health and wellbeing. They now feel they are being corralled into a town away from the places that connect them to their families, their lands, their spirituality. Moreover, there do not appear to be plans to introduce timely and sufficient (if any) infrastructure into those towns to ensure their adequate accommodation.

A Living Letter report by NATSIEC is soon to be released which, I am sure, will be brought to your attention with a request to find ways of improving what is happening in the Northern Territory.

I am attaching the speech that Graeme Mundine gave to our CES forum, together with the Living Letters Statement. I urge you to read these in full.

I am sure that submissions to the final report of Senate Select Committee in Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities raised many of these issues. I note from that Report, for example:

- Paragraph 2.5 states: “This question (ie What is the future vision for regional and remote Indigenous communities and what opportunities will exist within them?) must be answered through consultation and consensus and not just by a top down approach instigated by governments.”
- With regard to the future liability of smaller rural and regional communities and outstations and whether governments continue to subsidise all smaller remote communities or require people to move to larger regional centres, Paragraph 2.6 states: “This decision will need to be made following extensive discussion with communities.”
- Paragraph 2.16 reminds that: “A one size fits all policy and program approach will have inconsistent results given the differences in each community.”

I appeal to you to read this powerful talk and the accompanying letter and to take notice of the report that will be released in the near future.

Yours faithfully

Heather McLaren
Chair
Christians for an Ethical Society

15 October 2010