



# Rebuilding from the ground up: AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE NT INTERVENTION

**The NT Intervention has been a disaster for Aboriginal communities.** Rather than 'closing the gap', government statistics show Indigenous incarceration rates have risen by almost 30 per cent (1), school attendance is down in many places (2), suicide and self harm have increased (3), and thousands of workers are being put onto Centrelink as CDEP closes down. There are growing crises in urban centres such as Alice Springs as large numbers of people move in from the bush (4).

The suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act to seize land, assets and authority has destroyed trust in government and many well run programs. Much of the unprecedented investment of more \$1.5 billion has been wasted on government bureaucrats and contractors.

Alongside the Intervention, the NT government has introduced policies guided by the same approach of paternalism and assimilation including dissolving Aboriginal community councils, effective cuts to homelands and smaller communities, and bans on bilingual education.

There must be an urgent shift from punitive controls to measures which restore community control, rebuild Aboriginal initiative and capacity, and improve shocking living conditions. This must start with repeal of NTER legislation and the clear application of the Racial Discrimination Act to all laws affecting Aboriginal communities (5).

The government must apologise for the pain and damage caused by the Intervention.

Development must be based on commitment to land rights, self-determination and recognition of the unique strengths and circumstances of each community.

All policies relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must comply with the 46 Articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which Australia now officially supports (6).

**1. Restore Community Governance:** Urgently rebuild Aboriginal community government councils. Restore decision making power and administration of municipal services to these councils. Transfer all assets seized by the shires to the Aboriginal councils and pay compensation for all other assets sold off by the shires. Remove Government Business Managers installed by the Intervention. Repeal

Business Management Area Powers which grant the Minister the capacity for total control over the budgets and direction of organisations receiving Commonwealth funding.

**2. Increase government investment in ALL communities:** Abandon the 'hub towns' model. Rapid improvements in education, housing, health and community services are required wherever Aboriginal people choose to live -in urban areas, remote communities and on homelands.

**3. Jobs with Justice:** Create a new Aboriginal employment program to replace Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) that have been gutted through recent reforms and are exploiting Aboriginal workers. Jobs created must pay at least award wages, with rights to join unions and collectively bargain. The program must be administered by community based organisations, with development needs and priorities set through broad community consultation. All willing workers should be employed.

**4. No to Township Leases:** End compulsory 5-year leases over Aboriginal township land **taken** through the Intervention. Stop pressuring communities to sign extensions on these leases. Lift the requirement that 40-year leases are signed with the government before housing can be built. Rescind all township leases signed since the Intervention began in 2007.

**5. Housing for All:** Return administration of housing stock from the NT Department of Housing to local Indigenous housing committees attached to the community councils. Funds for housing construction and renovation currently going to the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) run by government and (continued overleaf)

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major construction firms must be redirected to the local committees.

Funds for new housing must be available to all communities and substandard SIHIP renovations reassessed for further needs. Employment on housing programs should involve 80 per cent Aboriginal workers (7). Train and employ a permanent housing maintenance team in every community.

**6. Empowerment through Education:** Lift the ban on bilingual education and allow the expansion of bilingual programs in NT schools where requested. Invest in training and employment of Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal teachers' aides and ensure they play a central role in curriculum development. Provide resources and employment opportunities to enable schools to become important centres of culture and community life. Invest in staff, infrastructure and equipment to ensure all remote Aboriginal schools have full time qualified teachers and enjoy the same resources per enrolled student as schools across Australia. Stop punitive programs linking welfare payments to school attendance.

**7. Abolish Compulsory Income Management:** Redirect funding from punitive welfare controls to community based programs. Lift incomes above the poverty line (8).

**8. Community Controlled Social Services:** Fund early childhood programs, youth services, men's programs and women's centres, with specific needs determined through the local councils.

**9. Health:** Implement the recommendations of the Health Impact Assessment by the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (2010), which recognises the importance of self-governance, housing, education and cultural respect in determining health outcomes (9).

Adequately fund health services in all communities. Consult with communities and health service providers to ensure programmes are appropriate and not duplicated. Support Aboriginal-managed health services. Fund and train Aboriginal health workers and Aboriginal liaison officers.

**10. Non-Discriminatory Alcohol Management:** Repeal blanket alcohol bans in Aboriginal communities. Provide resources to allow communities to develop

local solutions to alcohol misuse that are driven by and appropriate to the needs of the community. Resource culturally appropriate and accessible alcohol treatment programs in all communities. Broader measures to empower communities, employ Aboriginal people in rewarding work and ensure delivery of basic services are crucial for dealing with problems associated with alcohol.

**11. Justice not Jail:** End all discriminatory laws that have led to increased police harassment and incarceration of Aboriginal people. This includes race-based alcohol restrictions, the capacity to suspend the need for a warrant to enter premises on Aboriginal land, blanket pornography bans, stigmatising signage in Aboriginal communities, and local council by-laws in Alice Springs which target the homeless. Repeal 'star chamber' powers that suspend the right to silence for Australian Crime Commission investigations in Aboriginal communities. Remove NTER prohibitions on the consideration of Aboriginal customary law in bail and sentencing. Recognise customary law as an important vehicle to empower communities to take responsibility for offending and improve community safety. **For references, visit: <http://stoptheintervention.org/alternatives-to-the-intervention>**  
**For background research and video: <http://www.jumbunna.uts.edu.au/researchareas/alternatives.html>**

**Endorsements include:**

Rev Dr Djinyini Gondarra OAM (Galiwin'ku), Yananyumul Mununggurr (Yirrkala), Barbara Shaw (Mt Nancy town camp), Bob Randall (Mutitjulu), Harry Nelson Jakamarra (Yuendumu), Peggy Brown Nampijimpa OAM (Yuendumu), John Leemans (Dagaragu) and other Aboriginal leaders from more than 20 communities. Organisations and supporters including: Intervention Rollback Action Group (Alice Springs), Stop the Intervention Collective Sydney, 'concerned Australians', the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Tangentyere Council, Larrakia Nations, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR national), National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning UTS (Research), NT Greens, Jeff McMullen, Ian Thorpe.



**ALTERNATIVES  
2  
INTERVENTION**



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Send endorsement to:  
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