

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON KEVIN RUDD

From Yolngu of the Laynhapuy Homelands

03.02.2009

Yolngu clans of the Laynhapuy Homelands support the Rollback the Intervention message to the Prime Minister and Parliament this 3rd of February 2009.

While we support the Government's elevation of the issues of chronic Aboriginal disadvantage in remote communities, and welcome investment to address years of neglect, we cannot agree that the continuation of the Intervention is the best way to move forward.

Heavy handed and directive policies will not find favour and will fail. Smoke and mirrors will only serve to promote distrust and discord.

The success of addressing disadvantage will very much depend on a partnership with the local communities, and close examination of local initiatives already in place with a supportive Whole of Government approach.

However, the Whole of Government approach will be littered with failure unless the ghosts of the past are laid to rest.

Engagement and consultation must be taken seriously from our brothers and sisters, not just viewed as token Indigenous knowledge that is quickly disposed of in the nearest waste paper basket.

The vision of our old people – comes with responsibility, to maintain our land, the wanga and our culture. Our clans want to develop their own different economic future, and find employment opportunities that support their dreams and aspirations, which keep control of our land and resources in our hands. This is our vision for economic development.

Yes, we do need investment in order for economic development to progress in our Homelands, however, we must be careful that the Intervention and '*closing the gap*' does not just become another word for assimilation.

We call on the Australian Government to:

- Cease the NT Intervention
- Sign and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples
- Reinststate the Racial Discrimination Act, and the NT Anti-Discrimination Act
- Transition Income Management to a voluntary based scheme
- Recognise Indigenous Australians in the body of the Constitution
- Retain CDEP as a waged based program. It is a backwards step to turn 'work' into 'welfare'

We agree that there is nothing dignified about existing in housing with 30 family members. There is nothing dignified about substance abuse and family violence. But there is certainly nothing dignified about losing your rights as a human being, based on being an Aboriginal citizen. We as a people have merit. We have worth. We have incredible

knowledge and culture. And most of all we have courage and hope for our future.

Mahatma Gandhi made an observation of the richness of diversity and the underlying principles that bind us all as members of the same human family: *"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."*

So Prime Minister, recognise and appreciate our diversity, let us come together, after decades of neglect, and extend to each other the common hand of equality, respect and human decency, that can empower us to address these difficult challenges and lead us forward.

Prime Minister, I would like to explain to you what this symbol here, the Net, means to us in the Laynhapuy Homelands. The Ganybu traditional fishing trap or net was used to trap Gangal (fresh water cat fish) in fresh waters. This method of fishing was used back in the old days traditionally by Yolngu who lived in their Homelands, including the Djapu and Dhudi Djapu clans. The old people interpreted the image of the Ganybu (net) as a fishing tool, to catch good, decent people – both Indigenous and non Indigenous to work together as one for Laynhapuy Homelands Association, in order to educate our Yolngu of the Homelands.

The old people chose the net to be the logo of the Laynhapuy Homelands so that we could determine our own future, manage our own affairs and to become self sufficient and also to respect each other, through working together in partnership.



Prime Minister, we extend our hand in offer to walk this path together, in partnership through the symbol of the Ganybu net - side by side, for the future of our children, and our children's children. We cannot turn back. We must get it right.

But make no mistake, we will unite, not divide. The Yolngu clans are strong in our resolve to unite for our common purpose.

The 44th President of the United States is under no illusion that he has to unite all voices as one. On the 22nd January, Obama said *"the time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation; the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness."*

.We reach out to the Prime Minister of Australia and say yes, we are all equal, we are all free, and we do deserve a chance to pursue our full measure of happiness. But racially discriminatory legislation is not the way forward. The Intervention is not the way forward. We do not believe it truly is your way.

With so many world leaders supporting the desire for human rights, the issue is becoming increasingly impossible to ignore. However, as rightfully pointed out by the 14th Dalai Lama, *"It is not enough that the United Nations has defined human rights: They must be implemented."*

Prime Minister, our basic human desire for freedom, rights, dignity and happiness cannot and must not be subdued.

Leave behind your pre-conceptions, step away from your own thoughts of right and wrong, and search deep beneath the photographs of Intervention misery plastered across the newspapers.

We chose to elect you as our leader.

Prime Minister, we are asking you, to stop the Intervention, protect our human rights and dignity, and lead us to unity.

We are placing our trust in you.

We ask you to lead us to one voice, and a future for all.

Thankyou.



Yananymul Mununggurr

On behalf of the clans of the Laynhapuy Homelands, North East Arnhem Land

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