

On the 21st June 2007, the then Australian Liberal Government announced the rolling out of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response. The response allowed federal Intervention into the lives of Indigenous Australians' to such an extent that it threatens to eradicate or seriously jeopardise Indigenous control over Indigenous affairs and, as such, has been criticised as a return to the racist 'protection' and 'assimilation' policy eras of the past.

Although the Government claims the measures implemented within the Northern Territory stem from *The Little Children are Sacred* report (Anderson and Wild 2007), there is little resemblance of the reports' 97 recommendations within the measures set out in the 'National Emergency Response'. The policies to take effect, supposedly under the guise of 'stabilising and protecting communities...(and for the)...welfare of Aboriginal children', focus on welfare quarantines and alcohol restrictions, increased police presence, banning of pornography, scrapping the permit system and acquiring five year leases of town camps, appointing community managers and abolishing Community Development and Employment Programs (CDEP).

The speed with which the Intervention was announced, medical and military personnel deployed into Indigenous communities, and the corresponding lack of any information campaign informing the targeted communities of the dramatic changes to their rights and daily existence, not only created fear and confusion within communities but was also indicative of the paternalistic and racist nature of the Intervention. The absence of community consultation, the lack of acquisition of Indigenous consent regarding the Intervention and the potential detrimental impact of the intervention on Indigenous health and well being are major concerns that the Intervention may in fact worsen the situation for Indigenous Australians.

The measures currently being implemented in the Northern Territory seek to extinguish collective and individual rights, native title and Indigenous self-determination. The Aboriginal Rights Coalition, a network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists view the Intervention as a gross breach of human rights and are campaigning for its immediate repeal. For more information:

www.aboriginalrightscoalition.wordpress.com

Booklet produced by Shae C-F, Nat Wasley and Sarah Thorne, on behalf of ARC,
from transcripts of workshops held at Convergence on Canberra Feb 11 2008

'AN ILLEGAL OCCUPYING GOVERNMENT' TELLING US WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO LIVE...'



...INDIGENOUS VOICES SPEAK OUT ABOUT THE NORTHERN TERRITORY INTERVENTION.



Mauri Japarta Ryan

Why was the intervention put in place? They say because of what happened to children in the Northern Territory, but I say that is incorrect. There are a lot of these children affected everywhere; sexual abuse, physical abuse, and mental abuse.

What we got to focus on is why this happened and how it is hurting all those people from Darwin down to the other side of Alice Springs.

It is affecting a lot of people emotionally and physically.

People cant afford to live. This is one of the most racist acts in legislation since the white Australia policy and the legal system in the NT and elsewhere is sitting on its arse saying nothing!

Because sometimes Aboriginal people don't count. We don't count at all! Even our own Aboriginal representatives have been gagged by the government. They can't open their mouths about the Intervention.



This is really hurting our people. This country was made rich on Aboriginal land and seas, and yet Aboriginal people are refused the wealth made from those things! Land which belonged, and still does, to Aboriginal people. We've nurtured this land for over 60,000 years, and we're given jack shit by the government.

Everyone has to tell the government and Rudd that this intervention has to stop.

We have to open our mouths and support the Indigenous fight against the most racist intervention since the first invasion of this country and the white Australia policy.

That law is still the same as last year, even though there is a new government. The government can easily tell us to leave the land whenever they need it. This control over the leases also gives the Australian government the right to exclusive possession to repair and demolish any existing buildings and infrastructure and to terminate the lease at any time.

We live in fear of the government coming in and taking our leases.

The business managers that they have appointed have also got extensive powers...and are in every single prescribed community. We've been demanding housing for years, but to no avail. In less than two months the government provided full housing for the managers, complete with six foot high barbed-wire fences surrounding them!

The minister also has powers to unilaterally alter funding agreements in all our communities. This means that we don't even have certainty over the funds which we already possess in our communities. The government can suspend community-elected councils and appoint managers for associations on service-related grounds.

The legislation is also causing a lot of problems for people who receive welfare. They have said that anyone who receives government grants will immediately have that grant halved. They then take that half and set it aside for food and rent.

One woman down here is in her seventies and receives the pension. She lives in a prescribed area. She has worked all her life and she is now being subjected to these welfare reforms.

So that is what the bill means to us and our communities.

What they've done is make our lives, lives of uncertainty.

We want everyone here to help us stop this NT Intervention.

Eileen Hoosan - Mt Nancy Town Camp

We're supposed to all live under the same law in Australia, but we don't.

In all the prescribed areas there are particular laws which we have to live under. **It gives police powers to do what they want in those prescribed areas.** The Australian Federal Police now have the powers to come into our homes unannounced and search anything they want. They can confiscate anything that is in our homes, like computers for example... to detect pornographic material. They say that pornography is an issue and yet most of us in remote communities don't know what that is. It is not an issue. We know what is right and what is wrong.

We met with the police and told them that this bill was supposed to protect women and families but all we've seen is that police have extraordinary powers. They don't need orders. If they suspect that there is someone inside that they need to talk to they can simply walk on in. We did want to work with police. We tried to explain to them that this behaviour creates negative images of police in the minds of the children watching it.

The Intervention also imposes five year leases to "better manage investment and manage living conditions in townships". Under the Act the Commonwealth Minister now has the same powers as the NT Minister to administer, breach or resume a town camp lease. That means they can take our leases off us. The commonwealth minister has additional powers to compulsorily acquire town camp leases without any notice or process and veto the free hold title itself.

So the leases that we fought for thirty years ago, they can come and compulsorily take that lease from us.

The new compulsory powers do not follow the normal rules including notices to the lease holders. Basically, if you have a lease over your land anywhere in Australia you have the right to act for that land.

We don't have that right anymore.

Us guys in the NT are the most impoverished people in Australia. We're fifteen to twenty years behind the rest of Australia in a lot of areas; health, education and also jobs. There are always sandbags and brick walls that we hit. And it is not only in the government sector it is in the private sector too.

I'm totally against the intervention, I've always been. They've thrown tens of thousands of dollars at it. But it is not about money it is about principle. It is about how we want to live and how we want to move forward.

This government didn't even consult or negotiate with anyone.

When they got [the Little Children are Sacred] report, they put out a press release and connected welfare reform with land tenure. Now, that is the guts of the Intervention.

When we talk about the land grabbing, and the minerals underneath the earth, and you look at the town camps within the townships you realise they're prime real estate. That is what they're after, they are after our land.

When the town camps first developed they were on the outskirts and the fringes of the towns. As the towns have grown, they've come within eyesight of town camps. They want to move us somewhere, but I don't know where we're going to go. This government's saying that we've all been sitting on the fence. We have been trying to tackle all these issues.



In order to stop this Intervention we all need to stand together and tell them how we want it done.

They've made this great divide within the Aboriginal community.

We need to band together.

Walter Shaw - Mt Nancy Town Camp

I'm from Alice Springs, NT. We're affected by this Intervention because we live in what is called a prescribed area. All Aboriginal communities in the NT are now classed as prescribed areas.

We've really started to feel some of the effects of the Intervention. It really hasn't been an effective strategy to deal with problems we face in our communities. These problems stem from a lack of resources and a lack of funding.

Our talks with the government always fall on deaf ears. There was no consultation with any of us in terms of this Intervention. What Mal Brough did was put his ideologies on a piece of paper, passed it through parliament and then implemented it on our communities.

None of us knew what the Intervention was going to do.

Once the government got hold of this report they took advantage of it, used it to racially vilify, in law, all Aboriginal men as child sex abusers. Now I'm a father to be in the next 9 weeks, and I know I'm not one of them. I'm not an alcoholic or a paedophile and I don't abuse children. So we have to defend our community status as Aboriginal men in the broader community. Letting people know that we are not paedophiles or alcoholics

Once the bill was passed a whole group of Aboriginal communities rallied in Alice Springs, at the NT Chief Minister's office. A symbolic gesture was made where all the Aboriginal women shredded the bill and burned it.

This is because they feel responsibility for our children and know that this is the wrong way of doing business.

The Federal Government put up these big blue signs warning against alcohol and pornography. We cannot consume alcohol anywhere in our town camps. We can't even drink in our own houses. Now that is one human right that everyone is entitled to.

Another thing is that the NT police have been dealing with us with very heavy hands. Us guys in Alice Springs had an understanding with the Alice Springs police and that understanding has basically deteriorated since this Intervention began. We've always worked with the po-

They scrapped the permit system and are disrespecting our culture too. A white policewoman went out in her car to Aboriginal sacred ceremonial ground. This is ground that even Aboriginal women aren't allowed to walk on and she walked over it!

We've come here to seek help, because we're not getting any help up there.

This is a poor policy for Aboriginal people.

If we don't stop it now it will flow on.

We need to make policies for ourselves.

We need Aboriginal control over Aboriginal affairs!



In Katherine during Christmas time people travelled over 300 kilometres to go and get their store cards from Katherine's Centrelink... their ration cards.

In the end there were 500 people there and Centrelink ran out of store cards. So people with kids, old people, they went without anything for whole Christmas because Centrelink ran out of cards.

People had to hang around Katherine for the whole long weekend because Centrelink shut down and had run out of store cards.

Barbara Shaw - Mt Nancy Town Camp

You see these men here? They're prescribed area men. They look after their children and their women. And they're not paedophiles! They're community leaders who everyone looks up to.

When there is a problem in our communities we deal with it. What Mal Brough did last year was wrong. He only spoke to a few people in our communities, the ones who welcome the Intervention. When I converse with our communities I contact all the community leaders properly. The business managers are not communicating with the people in the communities.

Tijikala (Aboriginal community) had a tourist enterprise out there running on CDEP. As soon as CDEP got scrapped the tourist enterprise went down and our men became unemployed. Now our men have to line up outside Centrelink to get their wages.

We've got ration cards. All of our people are lining up at Centrelink. But Centrelink isn't sending information out to our communities in time so that our people can be fed. There was an old man who walked off the cattle station in Wave Hill [Vincent Lingiari in 1967] because he didn't want to get paid in vouchers or rations.

We don't want to be paid in vouchers or rations anymore!

At our council we've been running a food voucher system for more than thirty years. I don't think he (Brough) liked our food voucher system because it worked. He has come out with these little gift cards. They expect us to walk around in the hot heat of Alice Springs to collect our food and then walk 5 kilometres out of town to get our photographic ID!

This takes us back to 1890 when they started the ration days. They talk about our children not going to school. But our children go to schools at town camps and out in the bush. They're not putting higher education out there for our kids!

We need to scrap this Intervention and focus on the real problems of health, housing and education.

lice to solve problems within our own communities. But because these police have so many abusive powers now, any kind of mutual respect has gone out the window.

I'll give an example. A lady a few months ago had police turn up to her house with two police cars and ten police officers. This lady was sleeping out the front on her veranda. They didn't announce themselves, just walked straight into the house and pulled the blanket off her. She woke up frightened and grabbed a stick to defend herself and they pepper sprayed her. They threw her in the back of the police wagon and took her down to the jail. They didn't provide any medical assistance whatsoever until our council [Tangentyere] intervened. Now she is being taken to court for resisting arrest and assaulting police officers.

You've got people doing the right thing for their families, providing for their families. This lady looks after her whole family very well, and yet she was subjected to the laws entailed in this Intervention.

We've been through a lot in the NT because our government, the NT Government, doesn't have the guts to stand up for its own rights as a Territory nor the human rights of Aboriginal people.

We want this Intervention to be abolished as soon as possible.

We want it squashed.

We want the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd and his Indigenous Affairs minister, to jump on a bloody plane, come down to all Aboriginal communities and do it properly.

There is a right way of doing business and there is a wrong way.



Walter Shaw -continued-

A lot of money has been coming out with the Intervention. But this is not a matter of money, but how we as people are going to live. Overcrowding is responsible for many other social epidemics. The reason Aboriginal communities have been going in a downward spiral is because of a lack of resources, lack of funding and the fact that our voices are falling on deaf ears.

The Intervention decided on a systematic approach in quarantining people's money. So they had to abolish CDEP.

They did not care about the functionality or the operational capacity of CDEP.

CDEP are all individual programs run by individual communities as program managers. CDEP allowed people to have real jobs and permitted cross funding between programs. Essential services, such as old people's services depended upon CDEP.

If five year leases were to be put on Aboriginal communities all of the essential services would get outsourced back to the NT government. We would then have to tender for any contracts for services. Whereas with programs that *aren't* government mandated we can see what works for the individual, for the community and for the families.

A systematic and paternalistic approach will not work with Aboriginal people... They've tried it!

It is policy based on the ideology of people living 3000 kilometres away who aren't in touch with the people who are affected by the consequences of their advice.



Kath Martin - Athenge Lhere

For the first time in my life I had to go in (to Centrelink) and get a voucher so I could get food. They told me in order to use the voucher I had to go 25 kilometres Alice Springs. I told them I don't go there.

I'd rather not, I live out on my homeland.

My aged cousin, who is a bachelor and has lived on his land for all his life, has been placed on this quarantine. He hasn't got a family; he hasn't got a bloody thing!

This Intervention was that pipsqueak Howard's last stand. He thought: "Belt the blacks and I'll get in again". This is how it is with us. They're trying their rubbish out on us first! I'm exasperated. I just don't know what else to say.



Bowie Hicky - Redfem

How much longer can we keep walking and talking politics, under a white law, an illegal occupying law that has no legal jurisdiction. We are letting an illegal occupying government tell us what to do and how to live.

I would like to see something better come out of this gathering, that will blow this system apart so we never have to come back here again, we wanna go sit on our country with our children and grand-children, not fight through this system.

All we hear is white law. I want to hear about culture and our law, first!... Please give the old people a chance to talk culture and law, before white man law and politics.