

Statement to be launched with protest rallies on October 29:

## **Stop the NT Intervention - Jobs with Justice for Aboriginal workers**

Worse than Workchoices

The NT Intervention promised to deliver 'real jobs' for Aboriginal communities. Instead, thousands of waged jobs have been lost and Aboriginal organisations have been crippled as Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) close down.<sup>i</sup>

Under the new CDEP scheme designed by the federal Labor government, Aboriginal people no longer receive wages. They are being forced to work providing vital services such as rubbish collection, school bus runs, sewerage maintenance, construction and aged care in exchange for quarantined Centrelink payments.<sup>ii</sup>

People are compelled to work 16 hours a week for \$115 cash, plus \$115 credit on a 'BasicsCard' which can only be used on 'priority items' in government approved stores. Aboriginal workers have described this as a return to the "ration-days" when they were paid in food instead of cash.

Centrelink is threatening to cut off payments entirely if people do not participate. Unclear guidelines and the vulnerable position of many workers have seen cases of people working 30hrs or more for no extra money.<sup>iii</sup> This is far worse than anything the Liberals inflicted on workers under Workchoices.

The Labor government committed to halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in a decade. But due to a continuation of Howard era policies such as the Intervention, Indigenous unemployment has drastically worsened from 13.8% in 2007 to 18.1% in 2009.<sup>iv</sup>

500 'real jobs' created to replace some of the lost CDEP positions in remote NT shire councils face the axe next year. The Commonwealth is refusing to guarantee ongoing funding of \$8.5 million per year needed by the NT government to keep the jobs.<sup>v</sup> Many Aboriginal communities serviced by these shires already suffer atrocious living conditions – 500 more job losses will be devastating.

The NT Intervention shames Australia. Despite recent amendments, the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) ruled in August that Intervention legislation provides clear evidence of "embedded racism" against Aboriginal people.<sup>vi</sup> The UNCERD report said living conditions had deteriorated for Aboriginal people under the Intervention through loss of land, property, employment, legal rights and opportunities for cultural development.<sup>vii</sup>

Rather than abandon failed policy, the government is planning to spend \$350 million (over 4 years) to expand income management across the NT.<sup>viii</sup> This money is desperately needed to create real jobs in Aboriginal communities and ensure the provision of basic services.

The government must act immediately to:

- Guarantee the 500 threatened Shire jobs
- End compulsory income management
- End current CDEP arrangements forcing people to work for the BasicsCard
- Turn all CDEP positions into fully waged jobs
- Provide massive investment in job creation and service provision in all Aboriginal communities.

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- <sup>i</sup> There were approximately 7500 CDEP participants receiving wages in the NT before reforms that came with the Intervention. See Altman, J 'Neo-Paternalism and the Destruction of CDEP', *Arena* 90, September 2007 at [http://www.federalintervention.info/docs/issues/Altman\\_Paternalism.pdf](http://www.federalintervention.info/docs/issues/Altman_Paternalism.pdf)
- <sup>ii</sup> See Gibson, P *Working for the Basics Card in the Northern Territory*, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning UTS Briefing Papers at <http://www.jumbunna.uts.edu.au/publications/pdf/JIHLBP12.pdf>
- <sup>iii</sup> *The Age* June 16 2010 <http://www.theage.com.au/national/for-some-workers-the-struggle-will-never-end-20100615-yd9p.html>
- <sup>iv</sup> *Crikey* June 4 2010 <http://www.crikey.com.au/2010/06/04/closing-the-gap-rudd-overpromised-on-indigenous-unemployment/>
- <sup>v</sup> *ABC* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/04/2918143.htm> and <http://search.abc.net.au/search/click.cgi?url=http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/18/2931143.htm&rank=3&collection=abcall>
- <sup>vi</sup> *ABC* <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2010/s2996077.htm> and <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/08/17/2985720.htm>
- <sup>vii</sup> A full copy of the UNCERD report is available at [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/co/CERD-C-AUS-CO-15\\_17.doc](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/co/CERD-C-AUS-CO-15_17.doc)
- <sup>viii</sup> *ABC* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/22/2933374.htm>