

'And we Indigenous people say that we should be living together, one country, one Prime Minister and seeing each other and treating each other equal. But nothing happens like that. You are dividing the nation into two. See. And that is very wrong.

Bagot Community Elder, Darwin NT

Dear Senator,

I am writing in support of Aboriginal People in the Northern Territory to express my deep concern at the legislation which is currently before the Senate concerning the proposed restoration of the Racial Discrimination Bill (RDA) in relation to the NT Intervention. The suspension of the RDA which has brought Australia shame in the international arena must be restored – and in full measure. Its restoration must not be at the cost of itself being weakened by the 'special measures' clauses as in the present legislation. As Dr Alitya Rigney, Kurna Elder SA states, *'Reinstate the RDA with all its powers for the First Peoples of this country.'*

The 'Special Measures' so called, to name just two, include continuing with 1) Aboriginal freehold and other title land being under automatic compulsory 5 year lease and 2) Control of communities given over to the government appointed General Business Managers. **Government cites their hundreds of consultations make 'special measures' legitimate under the RDA.** In fact the Government's own reports of the consultations under the Intervention, record widespread difficulties, poverty, powerlessness, increased vulnerability and frustration voiced by those living under the many punitive measures. As well, under the Intervention permits to Aboriginal communally held freehold title land are waived, opening communities to anyone. (How will this help children?)

I am also very concerned that the present Government legislation includes **Income Management being extended to non-Aboriginal and other Aboriginal Australians across the nation, giving 'the Minister or Secretary' unprecedented and unchecked power** in respect to those on Social Security. Entitlements to declare 'any State, Territory/area' of Australia 'a disadvantaged area' - **so that automatically:**

- 'youth' 15 to 25 years, unemployed for 3 out of the last 6 months; people 26 years up to pension age, unemployed for 12 out of the last 24 months and anyone else who the government considers 'vulnerable' ('at risk') in these disadvantaged areas **will be Income Managed (IM)**. That is, issued with a BasicsCard quarantining 50% of their Social Security Entitlements to be only spent on food, clothes, rent, white goods – what the Government specifies. These can only be bought at shops/outlets which the Government specifies, can be set up for the Basics Card on which the 50% is inscribed
- the other 50% – **the cash, only** can be spent on other things like petrol, travel, phone costs, to pay off fines and other bills, to shop at other shops like 2nd hand clothes and cars, local deli, takeaways.
- if the amount on the card is not spent, it just builds up – it can't be accessed for other things. Separate queues at supermarkets may be used for those on the BasicsCard adding further shame and humiliation.

The government claims this is non-discriminatory legislation. In fact, it is both race and class discrimination – 'discrimination by post code.' The first area to be so proclaimed is to be the whole of the NT so that many more Aboriginal people will become 'Income Managed' along with NT non-Aboriginal people in the above categories. What positive health/housing services could be delivered with Income Management admin. costs of \$350m.

At the same time as the Intervention the Federal Government *is closing down Aboriginal Work Programmes (CDEP) at the loss of 1000s of jobs and services to communities. With the NT Government, *Homeland /Out - station communities have been subject to funding cuts so people in NT & elsewhere will be forced into large 'hub' communities *Shires established *The **9 NT bi-lingual schools are being forced to teach in English for 4 hours a day.** * After 2 years 9 months of the Intervention, just 8 houses have been built for Aboriginal people forcing the continuing overcrowded living in 3rd world conditions: little wonder *'rates of pneumonia among Central Australian children are the highest in the world'*. Long term research also in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, May 2010 has found that I.M. 'had neither brought any increase in sales of fruit and vegetables, nor any decrease in sales of cigarettes, tobacco and soft drinks.' (Both studies quoted in *The Australian* 17/5/10).

I urge you to work to amend this unfair, shameful legislation which diminishes all Australians

Signed

Date