

The Northern Territory Intervention

Students For Indigenous Rights - UQ

The reality of the Northern Territory Intervention

The Northern Territory Emergency Response Bill 2007 (aka the NT Intervention) was passed by the Australian Federal Government on 21st June 2007 in the wake of the Little Children Are Sacred Report (LCASR). The report claimed high levels of child sexual abuse in 45 Aboriginal communities .

The NTER saw the implementation of a package of measures purported to address the concerns of the LCASR in 73 Aboriginal communities, now extended to 98. Such measures included:

- Land reform involving the compulsory acquisition of pre scribed Aboriginal land under 5 year leases and the removal of the permit system
- The removal of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) resulting in the loss of over 7500 community jobs across the NT and the transferal to welfare payments of those previously employed under the program.
- Indiscriminate application of welfare quarantining, income management (IM), to ALL Aboriginal people in prescribed areas regardless of demographic.

IM delivers half of welfare payments on the so-called 'BasicsCard' which function as a vouchers in nominated supermarkets and community stores. This is designed to minimize possession of cash in communities. IM has increased hardship for many individuals and families, especially in remote areas, who may have to travel hundred's of kilometres to reach the nearest nominated store. It makes living on communities more difficult, creating incentives for people to move to cities. Since the introduction of IM, there has been a massive urban exodus. In Darwin, for example, the Aboriginal population has increased 30%.

Other measures include the prohibition of alcohol and pornography in prescribed areas, the appointment of Government Business Managers with extraordinary powers, able to seize control of all property and assets owned by Aboriginal organisations within communities. Consideration of cultural practice and customary law in criminal sentencing for NT offences has also been removed.



The BasicsCard forces Indigenous people to queue in separate lines from non-Indigenous people in shops

Child protection: A government smokescreen

Pat Anderson, co-author of the LCASR commenting on the above measures stated "there is no relationship between the Federal response and our recommendations." She continued in a later interview, "I would appeal to the Prime Minister to stop. Please stop, don't proceed, just stop... talk to Aboriginal leaders and work out a much more appropriate way to proceed."

In the 500+ pages of the NTER Bill, the word child is unused. All but two of the 97 recommendations of the LCASR were ignored.

More than 8000 children from the NT have received mandatory health checks. There was no increased identification of child abuse cases.

The Australian Crime Commission (ACC) established a National Indigenous Violence and Child Abuse Intelligence Task Force (NIITF). This Task Force found no evidence for the existence of paedophile rings in the NT. Instead, the findings suggest that poor information sharing between all involved parties (service providers, all level of government agencies) have led to an inadequate understanding of the extent and nature of child abuse and inadequate responses to address it.

Abuse of human rights

Dr Sarah Pritchard in a presentation to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission stated:

"A number of the key provisions [of NTER] may contravene the fundamental human rights of Aboriginal

people in the Northern Territory, and offend Australia's international human rights obligations. Of particular concern, from a human rights perspective, is the lack of consultation with the communities concerned, and the haste with which the legislation was prepared, and enacted." (2007)

Living standards have not improved

After 3 years of the "emergency response" there have hardly been any improvements of social or economic conditions in the so called "prescribed communities" in the NT.

- The unemployment rate has increased
- School enrolments and attendance have not changed.
- Income management has not resulted in people buying more fresh food and vegetables

Housing needs aren't being met

The Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) is a five-year, state and federal government program. It promised to deliver 750 new houses, rebuild 230 houses and refurbish 2,500 houses for Aboriginal people in the NT by 2013. The program has a \$672 million budget, of which more than \$200 million has already been spent.

The government's own data shows that as of May 2010 the following "progress" has been made:

- Only 11 houses have been built, and just 83 are currently underway
- 223 rebuilds and refurbishments have been completed, while 127 are underway

Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act

In July 1st 2010 the RDA was partially reinstated by "re-designing" NTER legislation so that racist policies were classified as "special measures" and welfare quarantining was rolled out throughout the NT with the intention of rolling it out nationally.

The new RDA also lacks a "notwithstanding clause" so discriminatory measures under the NTER cannot be challenged by the reinstated RDA.

The the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination rejected Labor's attempts to re-label intervention measures such as compulsory five year leases, the imposition of Government Business Managers and blanket alcohol and pornography bans as 'special measures'. The CERD ruled that the RDA has not been fully re-instated and Intervention laws demonstrate 'embedded racism in Australia'.

The Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner, Graeme Innes, has also hit out at the new Intervention legislation stating, "the provision of standard services to Aboriginal communities, that are available to all other Australian citizens, cannot be properly considered as special measures. It's wrong thinking, and disregards the rights, and diminishes the citizenship, of Aboriginal Australians."



Insulting signs placed outside of "prescribed communities" ban pornography and Alcohol

Changes to welfare

The government recently passed the Social Security and Other Legislation Bill 2010 extending welfare quarantining methods such as the Basics Card to individuals on welfare payments who are from designated areas throughout Australia and are deemed "vulnerable".

Only a few non-indigenous people have been effected by the roll out in the NT intervention and institutionalised racism means that it is a lot esier for them to appeal and regain control of their finances.

Welfare quarantining had already been extended on a trial basis into four Indigenous communities in Cape York in 2008 by Anna Bligh. It is not a large leap of faith to believe that when welfare quarantining is further rolled out nationally into targeted communities, it will be Indigenous people disproportionately effected.

Join UQSIR

The UQ Students For Indigenous Rights was formed at the University of Queensland in 2010.

We are working with unions and other campaign groups throughout Australia to build a national campaign against the Intervention. UQSIR wants a broad-based campaign that is open to all individuals, indigenous and non-indigenous that agree with our basic aim to roll back the Intervention and support Aboriginal rights.

For more information call: Coonan: 0427 090 590 or email: mgillespie3@gmail.com