

Land grab in the name of our children

For over 60,000 years, the land and the sea has been, and still is, a part of us, long before Captain Cook came and planted the Union Jack and claimed the continent in the name of the King. Ours is a story of struggles. Even though we are the first Australians, it wasn't until the 1967 referendum that we were recognised as having the right to vote in a country that really belongs to us.

Four years prior to the 1967 referendum, my people the Yolngu (Aboriginal) people from Yirrkala, in northeast Arnhem Land, sent a bark petition to the Federal government because we were not happy about the minerals being mined in our land. We were not consulted. Then, in 1969 the case *Milirrpum and others vs Nabalco and the Commonwealth* went to the Supreme Court in Darwin. That case was knocked back because the Western Law system could only recognise the fact that the Yolngu belonged to the land but not the land to the Yolngu. We kept fighting for our land and finally in 1976 the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* recognised our inalienable freehold title to our land.

There came many changes for us.

On the 21st June 2007 Prime Minister John Howard and Minister for Indigenous Affairs Mal Brough announced the sending of a humanitarian 'rescue' squad along with Norforce troops and the federal police to Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory in response to the 'Little children are sacred' report about child abuse.

It is fine for the Federal government to help with respect to child abuse, but there is a secret agenda. Under the guise of child abuse concerns, the government intends to take away our rights to our land and along with it the permit system that strengthens our rights to say who comes to our land. The government already tried to achieve this last year with their discussion paper about changes to the permit system. The changes were rejected because the communities were against them and we still are. So please join us in petitioning the government and ask them to **separate the issues of land rights from child abuse**. We want the best for our children, but it should not come at the price of our land, and the land of our children.

Rarriwuy Marika

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