

Summary Sheet: *This Is What We Said*

This Is What We Said: Australian Aboriginal people give their views on the Northern Territory Intervention.

First published in February 2010 by: 'concerned Australians', PO Box 281, East Melbourne VIC 8002. (ISBN: 978-0-646-52787-1)

This is a really beautifully presented A5 hard cover book - with lots of full colour photos from the communities affected by the Intervention. A great gift for like-minded (or, perhaps, less informed) friends!

This Summary Sheet includes:

**The text of the *Introduction* to this book (pages 5-8)
List of eminent Australians who have contributed comment
Recent statements by United Nations**

Introduction (a verbatim transcript)

(p5) *This Is What We Said* follows a recent report entitled *Will they Be Heard?* released in November 2009 which examined footage from three consultations undertaken by the Federal Government in three Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. It also looked at other community reports and five government regional reports from the same consultative process, which sought the views of representatives from all Northern Territory prescribed communities.

The views expressed during the three community consultations are strongly reflected in the reports of the five subsequent regional meetings, indicating that these are views commonly held across the Territory.

The consultations held in the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities between June and August 2009 were but a brief moment in the long history of Aboriginal people seeking to have their voices heard and respected.

This book focuses on the particular episode that began with the NT Government Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse. The co-authors, Pat Anderson and Rex Wild QC, released *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle: Little Children are Sacred* report on 15 June 2007. The report brought attention to alleged serious problems of sexual abuse, and other abuse, of Aboriginal children and highlighted the failure of government over decades to provide basic services (p6) to address the growing problems in the areas of health, rehabilitation, education and housing. The Anderson and Wild report offered 97 recommendations focused on the areas of education, alcohol reduction and rehabilitation, family support services, empowerment of Aboriginal communities and the appointment of a commissioner for children and young people.

In the light of what was to follow, the recommendation to empower communities was significant. In the summary of the report it states, 'Communities can take more control and make decisions about the future. The Inquiry's report suggests ways in which this can happen including the roles in which men and women can play, the introduction of community justice groups and better dialogue between mainstream society and Aboriginal communities.'

Before due consideration could be given to the report, the Federal Government announced its plan to introduce the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), or the Intervention as it is more commonly called. This happened on the 21 June 2007, just six days after the release of the Little Children are Sacred report and during the lead up to the 2007 Federal election.

The Intervention required the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act in the Northern Territory and the imposition of 'special measures' on 73 prescribed Aboriginal communities. The Intervention was rolled out by the Australian Defence Force under the leadership of Major General Chalmers.

(p7) The 'special measures' introduced were:

- income management whereby 50% of welfare monies are quarantined and controlled through the use of a 'basics' card
- five-year leases whereby the government compulsorily takes over people's land on leases
- alcohol restrictions imposing large fines for possessing alcohol in restricted areas.
- licensing of community stores
- establishment of Government Business Managers in each community
- pornography restrictions
- control over publicly funded computers
- law enforcement measures

In October 2008 a review of the Intervention was conducted by a panel of experts chosen by the Federal Government and chaired by Peter Yu, Executive Director, Kimberley Land Council. Many of the recommendations from this review were supported by Aboriginal people, such as the recommendations to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act and a change from compulsory income management to voluntary income management.

(p8) The response by Government was, however, to undertake its own extensive programme of consultations across all 73 prescribed communities. Government stated its preparedness to listen and wanted to hear the views of those directly affected by these measures. The consultations were conducted between June and August 2009.

Many Aboriginal people did share their views during the lengthy consultations but legislation now before the Parliament shows they have not been heard nor respected. This Is What We Said is one way of ensuring that some of the views that were expressed during the consultation process are put on record. The full transcripts can be found at: www.socialpolicyconnections.com.au

The Little Children Are Sacred report appeared to be leading towards community empowerment, which is a long way from current government thinking. Prominent Australians have spoken out against the Intervention in their call for genuine engagement with Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people are asking to be listened to and to genuinely participate in future planning. Here is an opportunity to hear what has been said by some for whom English is often a second, third or in some cases, a fourth language.

List of eminent Australians whose comments are included:

- Dr Gawirrin Gumana OA, Yolngu Elder
- Malcolm Fraser AC CH former Prime Minister
- Professor Larissa Behrendt, Director Jumbunna House of Indigenous Learning, University of Technology, Sydney
- Rex Wild QC, co-author of the 'Little Children are Sacred' report
- Sir William Deane AC KBE, former Governor General of Australia
- Irene Fisher, CEO Sunrise Health Service, Katherine
- Alistair Nicholson AO RFD QC, former Chief Justice of the Family Court
- Greg Thompson, Anglican Bishop of the NT
- Professor Mick Dodson AM, Australian of the Year 2009
- Justice Elizabeth A Evatt AC
- Julian Burnside OA Qc, Human Rights Advocate
- David Ross, Director, Central Land Council
- Yananymul Mununggurr, elected councilor, East Arnhem Shire
- Michael Anderson, Leader of the Euahlayi People
- Barbara Shaw, Aboriginal Rights Advocate
- Professor Patrick Dodson
- Professor Jon Altman, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University

Quoted statements from the United Nations:

Professor James Anaya, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous people, 27 August 2009 (Full statement at: <http://www.un.org.au/files/files/Press%20Release%20-%20Australia%20JA%20final.pdf>)

Mr Anand Grover, Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, 4 December 2009 (Full statement at: <http://www.un.org.au/files/files/Sp%20Rapp%20for%20Health%20Press%20statement%20Australia%20-%20FINAL%20Dec%204.pdf>)