

## **The 99-Year Lease Attack on the NT Land Rights Act**

The NT Land Rights Act is under attack from the new Federal Government. The new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Scullion, has been undertaking day-visit consultations to Aboriginal communities, seeking a Heads of Agreement with them to lease their town area to the Federal Government on a 99-year lease. This would extinguish native title on land which the NT Land Rights Act sought to secure for Aboriginal people in perpetuity! The inadequacy of the consultation suggests that the Government does not want the owners of the land to know the implications of their consent. This was the focus of a forum hosted by a traditional Aboriginal elder, Ms Rosalie Kunoth-Monks in conversation with Hon Malcolm Fraser, Hon Frank Vincent and Hon Alastair Nicholson on 27 November, 2013.

The 99-year lease is the latest assault on First-Nation people by Federal Governments of both political persuasions. The Intervention and the Stronger Futures legislation have led to a total disempowerment of Aboriginal people in the NT. The abolition of the Community Development Employment Program robbed Aboriginal Councils of Federal funding for local employment as teacher aides, school cleaners, health aides, housing apprentices, rubbish collectors. The NT Government further undermined Aboriginal self-determination by replacing Community Councils with Shire Councils controlled by the NT Government. They have determined that houses can only be built if the land is leased to the Government for 40 years, preferably by outside contractors. This has led to de-skilling in the community, a lack of housing and gross overcrowding. The abolition of the bi-lingual education program without consultation was another attack on traditional Aboriginal culture. The only remaining surviving area of Aboriginal self-determination are the isolated outstations on Aboriginal land. However, Governments have refused to fund these community centres while granting dozens of new mining leases!

The integrity of the NT Land Rights Act is really the last bastion for the preservation of traditional Aboriginal culture in Australia. Aboriginal elders like Rosalie Kunoth-Monks from Utopia in Central Australia and Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra from Galiwin'ku in Arnhem Land are appealing to the broader Australian community for support in re-instating self-determination in Aboriginal communities and in counteracting this 99-year lease attack on the Land Rights Act.

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