



"Solidarity" by Barbara Shaw

INTERVENTION ROLLBACK ACTION GROUP

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OPEN LETTER TO THE HONOURABLE KEN WYATT AM MP MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

21st June 2019 marks 12 years since the start of the Northern Territory Intervention (now called Stronger Futures). Although Aboriginal people have become conditioned to the detrimental impacts of those racist laws, the trauma is deeply entrenched and continues.

The Intervention has been devastating in many ways:

- Loss of community control, governance and assets
- Closure of community organisations
- Pressure to sign over land
- Imposition of income management which publicly humiliates and "marks" people when shopping, particularly in supermarket queues.
- Increase in racism and negative stereotyping
- Denigration of Aboriginal men
- Labelling Aboriginal men as child abusers
- The Intervention has taken away people's control over their lives and is insidiously and seriously affecting health. A sense of control now and in the future is known from wellbeing research to be a fundamental factor in both physical and mental health.
- Rise in suicide rates
- Excessive policing
- Increasing rise in incarceration rates
- Increase in number of children removed from families and communities
- Entrenching a sense of helplessness in future generations

**THE VOICES OF PEOPLE STRUGGLING UNDER THESE RACIST LAWS HAVE NOT BEEN HEARD,
OR THEIR PLEAS HAVE BEEN DISTORTED TO IMPOSE FURTHER REPRESSIVE LAWS ON THEM.**

Conclusion

This situation in the Northern Territory is untenable.

All reports, recommendations and findings state that the situation for Aboriginal people will not improve until they are the ones at the forefront in tackling the issues impacting on them. The first recommendation of the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* (Little Children Are Sacred) report

emphasised “the critical importance of governments committing to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities.”

Mr Fred Chaney (quoted in the report): “.... you need locally based action, local resourcing, local control to really make changes I think governments persist in thinking you can direct from Canberra, that you can have programs that run out into communities that aren’t owned by those communities, that aren’t locally controlled and managed, and I think surely that is a thing we should know doesn’t work.”

What needs to happen

Repeal of Northern Territory Intervention/Stronger Futures laws

- Empowerment of Aboriginal communities through local governance
- Support for people to live on their homelands
- Inclusion of First Nations history and learning of local Aboriginal languages in all education systems; encouragement and support for bilingual education
- Justice reinvestment; shut youth prisons
- Increased and ongoing funding for housing; community control over housing and local employment on building programmes
- Jobs programmes to suit community needs devised by communities
- Scrapping of income management – transition to voluntary basis
- Veto on removal of Aboriginal children; bringing back children already taken; working with communities and families and supporting community initiatives to care for children at risk
- Lifting the ban on customary law
- Action on Alcohol Management Plans which have stalled in Canberra for years
- Restoration of funding taken from Aboriginal organisations; cease funding non-government organisations to do the work that Aboriginal organisations can do
- Recognising that sovereignty has never been ceded; enabling Treaty processes to be set up and run by First Nations people

- Incorporating the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into law and using it as a tool for working with First Nations people

“Article 38 (Nation) States, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, shall take the appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to achieve the ends of this Declaration.”

“Article 43 The rights recognized herein constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world.”

We wish you as the new Minister working with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people all the best for the future and look forward to the situation improving for Aboriginal people in Central Australia, particularly those still struggling under the Northern Territory Intervention.

ELAINE KNGWARRAYE PECKHAM, BARBARA R SHAW

On behalf of the Intervention Rollback Action Group