

Will You Help to Prevent a Crisis?

The Commonwealth's commitment to Homelands and Outstations was surely sealed by the 1967 Referendum. How can it be then that the federal government can consider abandoning their long-held responsibilities by cutting essential funding to these especially vulnerable areas?

What is clear is that the Commonwealth knows full well that the consequences of the cuts will fall with brute force onto Aboriginal communities least able to defend themselves. Such behaviour is contemptible.

It is quite clear that state governments do not have the resources to simply replace Federal funding. Mr. Barnett in Western Australia has responded by indicating that he will close up to 150 remote Aboriginal communities by simply cutting off their essential services – water, power etc. Arrangements with the South Australia government are still to be determined but at this stage the outstations fear their fate will be similar to those in the West.

The results of such actions are perhaps too great to contemplate, just as there is no real attempt to understand the cultural implications of moving people from their traditional homelands.

What does closure mean? The relationship between Aboriginal peoples and their lands is acknowledged but little understood. The connection to land is the embodiment of Aboriginal cultural identity. It totally embraces a sense of belonging without which there is a life long sense of grieving and loss. It is only on your own land that you have rights – once you move these rights are lost and you become simply a squatter on somebody else's land.

Forced removals in the past have proved devastating and costly, not only to the communities themselves but also to the surrounding communities responsible for resettlement. Nearly all outback Aboriginal communities are under-resourced, have inadequate infrastructure and are grappling with social problems. To burden these communities further is unthinkable.

Such action would place Australia in conflict with international law.

"...forced evictions are ... incompatible with the requirements of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and could only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances..."

UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, General Comment No.4, (1991)

Pope Francis warns Australia of socio-economic disaster when he states, *"severing the ties of Aboriginal people from their land and thus their culture, spirituality and very foundation of their being, is unethical, immoral, un-Christian and heartless."*

We strongly believe that the Federal funding decision should be reversed. For this we need your urgent help. Can you either send letters or telephone Tony Abbott and Nigel Scullion and tell them that it would be totally unacceptable for funding to Remote Communities to be cut.

The Uniting Church, guided by Congress and local synods, opposes the closure of communities and forced removals. Many of the points they have made are included in the list below as a help for those who wish to write letters. Contact details of the Prime Minister and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs are also below.

Points for Letters –Writers Opposing Remote Community Closures:
(you may like to focus your letter on one or more of the below points)

- The unconscionable failure of the Federal Government to maintain its responsibility for the safety and future of Aboriginal Peoples from Outstations/Homelands.
- To close communities will create a wave of dispossession denying people the ability to stay in touch with their land and their culture.
- There has been no attempt by government to understand what such forced community closures and movement of people means for people’s social, mental, spiritual and physical life.
- There has been no consultation with Aboriginal people or the organisations which represent them regarding alternative solutions, and
- The movement of so many people would put enormous pressure on the communities they go to – housing, education, health facilities, and community relationships. Nothing has been done to plan for and deal with such impacts.

Hon. Tony Abbott: Parliament House, PO Box 6022, Canberra ACT 2600 Tel: (02) 6277 7700

Electoral Office: PO Box 450, Manly, NSW, 2095 Telephone: (02) 9977 6411

Hon. Nigel Scullion: Parliament House, PO Box 6100, Canberra, ACT 2600
Tel: (02) 6277 7780, or

Electoral Office: Unit 1, 229 McMillans Road, Jingili, NT 0810 Telephone: (08) 8948 3555

Telephone Calls to Oppose Remote Community Closures:

If you decide to telephone your concern to the offices of Mr Abbott and Mr Scullion please give your name and address while leaving a message stating your strong objections to these funding cuts that will lead to the closure of homelands/outstations. Demand that the decision is reversed.

If you have the energy, please do also inform your **Local Member** of your concerns.