

Eastern Suburbs Organisation for Reconciling Australia (ESORA)

9 June 2012

Eastern Suburbs Organisation for Reconciling Australia has been an active group since 1997 working to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations for justice and human rights and recognition in Australian society. We have contact with people in the Northern Territory affected by the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) who are soon to come under the 'Stronger Futures' measures. Over the last five years we have followed government reviews and publications of independent research related to the NTER.

Hereby we express our full support for the Yolngu Elders statement. We cannot stand by and allow this legislation to go forward when it clearly does not have the free, prior and informed consent of the people it will affect.

We note with alarm that the punitive and discriminatory direction taken by the NTER laws is now to be further entrenched for ten more years. All evidence which would indicate improvement in well-being has shown the abject failure of the previous five years policy. It is obvious that the government did not receive consent from its flawed 'consultation' process and failed in its duty to respect the wishes of the people affected. Furthermore the government has used that process to mask its intention to go ahead with measures clearly against the wishes of those who gave their trust and participated in the consultations.

We watched the Prime Minister's apology and his promise never to repeat the injustices of the past with great hope for the opportunity to reset the Government's relationship (and by inference the Australian People's relationship) with our First Peoples. We now feel we are witnessing policies that are the world's worst practice which is hard to believe could still happen in the 21st century. We had hoped we could walk in partnership, honouring the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to which the Australian Government affirmed its support on 3 April 2009, but now feel we will rightly be urged once again by UN rapporteurs to fulfil our obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, treaties to which we are a party, as well as (our obligations under) UNDRIP. The loss of such a great opportunity will see further tragedy unfolding in those affected communities and it will reflect shamefully upon us, one and all, as citizens of Australia.

The Yolngu Nations have put their plea for justice to the whole nation, indeed to the world and we as citizens stand in solidarity with them and call our government to account on this shameful legislation.