

Tangentyere Council Inc.

PO Box 8070
ALICE SPRINGS NT 0871
Ph. (08) 8951 4222
Fax (08) 8952 8521
Email: tangentyere@tangentyere.org.au



Tangentyere CEO calls for help from ‘fair-minded’ Australians

June 4, 2012

For immediate release

The head of one of the Northern Territory's largest Aboriginal organisations has made an impassioned plea for Australians around the country to unite in support of Aboriginal rights amid new legislation federally and at the Territory level which further disempowers Aboriginal people.

Walter Shaw, CEO of Tangentyere Council, which provides services to Aboriginal town camps in Alice Springs, says Aboriginal people in Central Australia are at breaking point. The federal government is planning to extend the Northern Territory intervention by another 10 years, and the NT Government is giving bureaucrats the power to enter Aboriginal homes under the guise of 'Public Housing Safety Officers'. They will be able to enter uninvited and use 'reasonable force' against residents.

Mr Shaw said governments had not learned from the mistakes of the past, and were introducing legislation without the consent of Aboriginal people designed to specifically target them.

"It's hard to believe that in 2012, we see paternalism at its worst," Mr Shaw said. "But that is the reality. That is our reality. Australians might have built a great nation, but in the process we have not changed the way we deal with Aboriginal people. The 'new way' of doing government business with Aboriginal communities is the same as the old way."

Mr Shaw said it was time for governments to engage properly with Aboriginal people, and for the policy direction of the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments to change.

"A major rethink is desperately needed on the bad policy being forced on Aboriginal people by our governments. It starts with genuine negotiation. The NT intervention's Stronger Futures legislation is grossly flawed and proper consultation has not been undertaken; the NT Government policy of making social housing problems such as overcrowding a law and order issue is also flawed.

"Aboriginal people stand ready to consult with government, in good faith. In fact we've been ready for decades. But this is not reciprocated. There remains little political goodwill from government for a real conversation. Just new laws and more legislation based on failed policies of the past.

"It seems to me our only recourse from bad policy – and deaf governments - is to hope that others may listen, and intervene. We must appeal to the goodwill of the many fair-minded Australians. The same Australians who voted yes in the 1967 referendum, who walked hand-in-hand over Sydney Harbour Bridge with Aboriginal people in 2000, and who embraced the National Apology."

Mr Shaw urged Australians to write to their local and state MPs, and consider joining organisations which promote and support Aboriginal rights, such as Amnesty International or ANTaR.

see also <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4055530.html>