

Women's Federation for World Peace

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The Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) Australia, a branch of WFWP International, an NGO in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, writes to acknowledge and support the Statement by the Yolnuw Makarr Dhuni regarding the Stronger Futures Bill.

We affirm the necessity for a respectful partnership between local communities and the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. Through WFWP International's experience working with indigenous peoples around the world, who under developmental pressures are likewise facing many difficulties, we recognise the importance of strategies developed by local communities in conjunction with governments and NGO's in adapting to changing circumstances. Such strategies which respect locally developed and culturally sensitive solutions have a much higher success rate than those imposed from a distance.

An appreciation of the complexity of the obligations that the community and especially the elders and women are dealing with is required. Much that has been carefully and painfully put into place by local communities to protect and educate their children has been swept aside in the haste to impose blanket solutions. As a women's organisation we feel for the women who have spent years building up proactive, grass root measures for their communities, whose successful activities have been disregarded as if they had no value.

The Yolnuw Makarr Dhuni statement clearly indicates the communities' willingness to partner constructively with governments, but also not to be bullied and pushed to abandon or discard all that is precious to them. Though houses may be built in hubs by government bodies, the calling of cultural and spiritual obligations in the homelands is of paramount importance to the elders. The obligation to perform ceremonies in the homelands is felt deep in their bones and heart. Homes cannot be transferred simply by an edict issued from above.

Similarly, if the process of resource investment undermines community confidence and disturbs cultural and spiritual roots there is no foundation upon which to build permanent solutions. The government's own "Closing the Gap clearinghouse" website (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/>) also emphasises the need for respect and engagement with local communities for real solutions to be found. However, the Assembly's statement clearly indicates this is not happening. In addition, in order to achieve a beneficial outcome for all, we believe it is important to take into account the impact of the trauma from past policies on the wellbeing of individuals in the community, and factor this into the time frame. Without listening carefully and responding sensitively, the mistakes from the past can easily be repeated.

We feel a deep respect and appreciation for the traditional knowledge, spirit and heart that the homeland communities and other indigenous groups have been keeping alive. We are all enriched by the philosophy and dynamic energy that has shown such resilience over the eons of time, and which makes Australia unique in the world. An integrated enriched Australia can develop from mutual respect guiding the ways we work together for the benefit of all.

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Australia