



Initiative and Ability to Listen - *but* - a Change is Desperately Needed

Today the Yolngu Nations Assembly sent a statement to the Prime Minister Julia Gillard, and Opposition leader Tony Abbott. It was also sent to other senior politicians in the Federal and Northern Territory governments, calling for a changed approach to policy in the Northern Territory.

The Yolngu Nations Assembly is made up of 8 Nations from West, Central and East Arnhem Land.

The Yolngu Nations Assembly statement clearly informs Government that it does not support the proposed Stronger Futures legislation. It has stated that it believe its aims and those of Government can be achieved through partnerships in communities and *based on the principles of self-determination*.

'concerned Australians' acknowledges this statement and gives its full support to it.

Spokesperson, Michele Harris, states that, " 'concerned Australians' joins with the Yolngu Nations Assembly, other social justice organisations and leading Australians, in calling for an end to the interventionist policies of the last five years. We again call on Government to abandon its plan for further punitive policy approaches that are enshrined in the Stronger Futures legislation as these are not only discriminatory but fail to embrace the goodwill of the people who wish to work in partnership. Government must not forget that the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination is clearly defined in the UN Declaration as a right of all Indigenous Peoples and must be respected."

The Yolngu Nations Assembly is calling on Government for a new commitment to the re-empowerment of communities *through locally-based and accessible forms of local government* whereby genuine responsibility can be taken by the people in the development of their own futures. It asks for the Land Councils to be allowed to independently advocate on behalf of communities, free from the political pressures that have developed over recent years.

'concerned Australians' hopes that Government will recognise from this statement the willingness of the Arnhem Land peoples to work with them.

It is a time to listen and to be brave enough to abandon top-down approaches that are more reminiscent of a past era. It is time to negotiate partnerships based in trust, and not in threats. It is time for Australia to understand its democratic responsibilities knowing that these lie as much in genuine respect as in dollar announcements. It is time, when Aboriginal people perceive themselves to be second class citizens, for a commitment of whatever it takes to ensure our national integrity by establishing equality for all Australians.