

To the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
Regarding the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill
(Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2011 and The Stronger
Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011

Dr. Sheila Collingwood-Whittick

I wish register in the strongest possible terms my opposition to the proposed Stronger Futures legislation.

As a foreign academic having spent a lifetime researching the calamitous impact of British colonialism on Indigenous peoples, I was appalled by the breathtaking racism and crudely opportunist assimilationism evident in the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

Today I am quite simply staggered that the present government should be preparing to compound its predecessor's egregious errors by seeking to introduce legislation which will extend the NTER provisions for an additional ten years.

Not only does the proposed legislation completely fail to take into account the views and wishes expressed by communities during the Stronger Futures Consultations, it unequivocally demonstrates the government's contemptuous disregard for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to which Australia itself is a signatory.

The proposed Stronger Futures Bill (what spin doctor, I wonder, is responsible for that cynical misnomer) is, moreover, in absolute contradiction with the ethical principle Prime Minister Kevin Rudd championed when he declared that "Decency, human decency, universal human decency demands that the nation now step forward to right an historical wrong."

How can it be possible that a mere four years after the Australian Parliament's historical resolve that "the injustices of the past must never, never, happen again," the current administration is proposing that the Northern Territory's Indigenous communities be maintained in what amounts to a "state of exception" (with all the terrible connotations that sinister phrase has the power to evoke)?

By keeping the people it targets in a state of abject disempowerment, with

no (or minimal) control over their lives, their land, their culture, such legislation effectively deprives those people of hope and, thus, of a future. To that extent, the Stronger Futures Bill is likely to prove as genocidal in its outcome as the infamous child removal policy or the earlier frontier "dispersals".

In the name of the universal human decency Mr Rudd exhorted his parliamentary colleagues to subscribe to in 2008, I implore the government to withdraw a Bill that runs directly counter to Australia's claims to be a humane and progressive democracy.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila Collingwood-Whittick