

Dear Senator Macklin

When the Labour Government was elected and especially when Prime Minister Rudd was responsible for the Apology to our Aboriginal People, many of us were so hopeful that at last our Australian Government would address effectively the plight of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters. That does not seem to be the case and we are feeling disillusioned with the Rudd Government. If the heart-rending statements written below are even half-true then I can only say that I am appalled by the ineffectiveness of your policies. If they are not true and there is another side to it, if the Aboriginal people are really benefiting from your policies, then clearly the Government is not doing a very good job in communicating that to ordinary Australian voters like me.

Yours sincerely

(Sr) Patricia Egan rsj

The Federal Government are now planning to get around the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) by extending Income Quarantining to poor ('disadvantaged') non Aboriginal people firstly in the NT and then across disadvantaged areas across Australia. Also by claiming that their 2009 consultations in the NT mean they can count the contraventions against the RDA as 'special measures'. Meanwhile despite UN and other support, 16,000 Aboriginal Territorians are suffering their 3rd year of these punitive measures and many more Australians - Aboriginal and non Aboriginal are in for some of it.

*The NT intervention has meant more hardship and shame for our people. We're suffering under the welfare quarantining system- 50% of Aboriginal people's welfare payment is converted into Basics cards, which we can only use at certain shops. Elders who have gone through earlier welfare days are feeling degraded -It's same old ration days of flour, tea and sugar and some clothing. The NT Intervention hasn't brought any improvements to our people's lives. It hasn't brought us any new houses. And, despite the fact that in Ampilatwatja, many of us are living in tin sheds with leaking sewerage, Aboriginal affairs minister Jenny Macklin has told us Ampilatwatja won't be one of the communities to get new houses built.*

*Richard Downs*

With the NT Intervention legislation) for the first time in the history of this country there was this amendment to the Families and Community Services Act that underpins the Social Security legislation. **Up until now – anybody as an Australian citizen was eligible for Commonwealth benefits or payments or entitlements. It is clearly their inalienable right** and inalienable benefit. That is **nobody** had the right to interfere with that payment or benefit.

Olga Havnen Australian Red Cross  
(Formerly Director of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the NT)

Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory continue to suffer with so many aspects of their life – income, land, employment, self governing communities, where they can live/travel- controlled under the Intervention which also suspended the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) so they have no recourse to appeal. To reinstate the RDA in response to overseas criticism, the Government now plans to extend control of income to non Aboriginal people on Social Security Entitlements (at the cost of \$7000 Centrelink to control an average income of about \$10,000! )

The Federal Government recently signed the UN document for Indigenous Peoples. At present the Intervention contravenes 26 of its 45 articles

- The Intervention was about making children safe. Many of the Recommendations have still not been put into practice
- Blanket income management means that everyone receiving Social Security income – Pensioners, Veterans, Unemployed - whether having children or not, whether their children are well cared for, regular school attenders or not, whether managing their money or not,- receives just half. The rest can be accessed only by the expense of travelling to get the Basic Card at Centrelink which may be 100s of kms away, shop at a designated store for food and designated other products, (now lining up in a separate queue.) Travel may have used up funds so if none available to get back home, many families either overcrowding town relatives or camping on outskirts of larger towns with children thus more vulnerable. (cf many submissions to Review & Irene Fisher of Katherine Sunrise Health Service 2009)  
No funds therefore may be available for essential funeral travel, payment of car or registration, payment of fines etc etc
- People displaced - moving interstate to avoid the Intervention even though the Income Management still follows them.
- The new Federal Budget I(2009-10)ifts the level of expense for administering Income Management to \$7000 pa each for incomes, some of which are little over \$10,000 pa
- Because the Federal Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) and NT Anti Discrimination Acts were suspended as part of the Intervention, no one under the Intervention can make a complaint about it. \*
- The anaemia rate of Aboriginal children in the wide area under the Katherine Sunrise Health Service has lifted from the already worrying 20% rate in 2007 before the Intervention to 55% currently. (Irene Fisher CEO)
- In 2009 the Federal Gov has conducted a series of consultations in communities which Aboriginal people and non Aboriginal advocates incl Amnesty International are concerned may be an attempt to ensure discriminatory measures will count as 'special measures' and ensure the RDA may now be reinstated with the discriminatory measures still holding.

*(A public meeting Melbourne November 23 in a launch by Malcolm Fraser , Alastair Nicholson QC and Larissa Brerendt 'Will They Be Heard?' presented analyses of the transcripts of 3 of the NT community meetings as above plus Gov's own reports of 4*

*General meetings Darwin, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Alice Springs in an attempt to thwart such consultations being used as 'evidence' to allow such loopholes)*

Reports we've received from the Alyawarr homelands and in the Barkly region show that the blanket quarantining of welfare has created significant hardships, harming the vulnerable people it is designed to protect. Some have been **unable to access food for up to two weeks, while others are forced to purchase food that arrives late and rotten**. Young children, the elderly and those with health problems are the worst affected -- one elder told us he "black[ed] out from waiting for the tucker too long." It's really very simple. These draconian measures **remove the rights of Indigenous people to manage their own money and their own lives**. In August, when UN Representative for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples James Anaya visited Australia, he found measures introduced as part of the Intervention to "overtly discriminate against Aboriginal peoples, infringe their right of self-determination and stigmatise already stigmatised communities."

Sarah Marland  
Campaign Coordinator  
Amnesty International Australia

*'When the (Northern Territory) Intervention started off I thought it was really good. Now I end up just walking out (from Centrelink) without anything in my hand, no money, just paper to go shopping every time in the Foodbarn. Centrelink are holding \$3000 of mine in income management. One time I asked them to give me some to go down to Alice Springs, they said, "You can't take it out." But I don't drink. They said I can only spend that money at Little Rippers (variety store) or Foodbarn. But I got my rent too, my power, my phone. I couldn't use it on any of these things.'* Margaret Limmerick, Tennant Creek

*'A lot of old people we have spoken to believe that this new law is taking them back to the old ration days and old dog tag days. This is another way of controlling us, where we are limited to stay in one place.'* Barbara Shaw, Mt Nancy Camp, Alice Springs