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Peter Hallahan
Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Room S1.61, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hallahan

I am writing to express the very strong concerns of IAD about the proposed changes by the Federal Government to the unique position of ATSI Social Justice Commissioner.

It is deeply ironic that at the time that Australia is militarily involved in overthrowing by force a regime deemed to be viciously suppressing the human rights of its population, the very same Australian government is repressing one of the most articulate and influential Commonwealth offices dealing with the human rights of its own First Nation people. This is the very same Australian government that has recently committed Australians to the important role of nurturing the birth of the East Timorese nation and contributed successfully and generously to providing infrastructure necessary to preserve the rights of the East Timorese people and their fledgling nation.

Whilst willing to do 'good deeds' outside of Australia this Federal government's actions internally in relation to its own Indigenous people deserve sustained and unrelenting condemnation. There appears to be no recognition of the double standard being affected. In any case, the proposals by the Federal Attorney-General are to be universally deplored.

As an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, IAD is deeply opposed to the proposal to abolish a position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. Our opposition is not based upon any wish to have a

particular advantage over other communities within Australia whose human rights or opportunities to achieve equality are being infringed upon. This is a matter of retaining a proven and successful structure consisting of a designated Commissioner knowledgeable about and focusing upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

Without exception this position has attracted Commissioners of unimpeachable stature. They have all made significant contributions to the nation's understanding of its obligations as a civilised community to the human rights of the nation.

The rationale for the proposed changes to the ATSI Commissioner as well as the other positions of Commissioner within HREOC is mystifying.

The regression of so many aspects identified in the decade old Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; the continuing decline in Aboriginal health, the lack of progress in redressing Aboriginal disadvantage in education and employment are but a few of the of what should be imperatives for sustained national attention. The ATSI Commissioner has and can continue to keep attention focussed on these issues.

The proposal for the consent of the Attorney General prior to the ATSI Commissioner intervening in a matter is retrograde. Rarely have or indeed will, the interests of the Commonwealth's Attorney and the First Nations people be consonant.

I would be very pleased to speak to you further on these matters.

Can I assume that your committee will consult widely across the country and particularly with Aboriginal Australians, on these proposals?

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joyce Measures
Acting Director