

PAPER TO THE WORKING GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

I thank the chairperson and this forum for allowing me to address the WGIP. I thank the indigenous peoples of this land also.

I am an Arrente person of the Central Arrente Tribe in Central Australia.

As Chairman of the Institute for Aboriginal Development which is in Alice Springs, I wish to draw to your attention an example of a struggle that my community is having with the Government of Australia.

The main issue that I will focus on may seem small compared to problems and situations that many other indigenous brother and sisters face in the communities, some of these issues I have been fortunate to hear at this forum, but in the context that I discuss this issue you will see that this is just an example of Aboriginal affairs in Australia.

Life for the indigenous people in the Northern Territory of Australia has always been difficult under the conservative governments. This Government has held power for at least 20 years. It has maintained power through racism. It campaigns to the mainstream that Aboriginal land rights will be the end to western civilization, that the black will steal your back yard.

The IAD has been at political loggerheads with the Territory Government for many years.

First let me tell you a little about the territory Government. They have used government dollars to legally challenge the validity of every land claim that has been presented under the northern Territory Lands Rights Act since it has been in place.

At present, the government has just brought in ~~mandatory~~ Sentencing. This law means that every person who is found guilty of a crime will automatically be sentence to prison for 18 days. This is irrespective

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whether that person has a criminal record or not. Imprisonment age starts at 15.

In Alice Spring, up to 90% of all inmates in the prison are Aboriginal, these averages are the same through out the Territory. The government wants to introduce a zero tolerance law, meaning that simple loitering will end in imprisonment.

The NT Government has restricted and has closed Aboriginal run schools.

A little on Federal politics:

- The current Federal Government has just avoided running a race base Federal Election on Native Title;
- The Federal Government has passively allowed the development of the right wing One Nation party that has a purely racist platform.
- The Federal Government has just moved legislation ^{which will} ~~that has removed~~ the right to negotiate with developers on their lands, effectively eroding basic Aboriginal control and rights on their lands.

IAD is an Aboriginal run and managed adult education institution. We have over the past three years maintained an average of 1000 students per year. Last year we had around 350 graduates, varying in courses from community development certificates to BA's.

We run these services out of old buildings and demountables, and for years have been lobbying the Federal and State government for funds for proper buildings.

In 1994, the Federal Government provided capital funds for independent Aboriginal Education bodies. IAD was awarded one third of its capital development funds, being 2.6 million dollars.

We thought we saw the light. Except for one thing, ^{THESE} ~~the~~ funds had to be channeled through the NT Government.

The NT Government has for the past three year^s prevented IAD receiving these funds. It is demanding that the Institute relocates and coexists with the Government mainstream TAFE institute. It is trying to force us off land that we hold freehold title to a site that they will lease to us. Their preferred site is close to a sacred site that is significant to the Arrrente people. Our elders and the community has told the Govern^{MENT} that this site is wrong and against the cultural belief of our Aboriginal community. The Government refuses to listen.

The community sees this as just another clear and ruthless attack on our rights of self-determination. The Govern^{MENT} has threatened to prevent all future funds going to the IAD unless it falls to the demand of the Government. Remember that this is not their money, this is a federal government fund. The NT government ^{is} using these funds to black mail the Aboriginal community to follow its agenda, and said many times that it does not support the Aboriginal community developing it's own agenda.

My community has been resolute that it will not bough^{DOWN} to this government and allow them to erode our human rights, to prevent us the rights to educate our own people that is culturally acceptable to us.

The federal Government has sat on its hands and refused to intervene in case it upsets the state and federal relationship, at the expense of the Aboriginal people.

This is just another example of the treatment of Aboriginal people by the governments of Australia.

In conclusion, I wish to finish off by saying that I have come hear for the following reason:

1. To have this opportunity to inform this forum of indigenous people from around the globe of the continual aggressive approach that the

NT Government has to indigenous people through out the land on all matters relating to indigenous people, and

2. Secondly, to inform indigenous groups in the South East Asia and the pacific regions of this hostile relationship that exist between the NT Government and the indigenous people, especially as the NT Government is promoting itself to this region and the rest of the world as a Government which is supportive of multiculturalism and a promoter of indigenous rights, when in fact it is just the opposite. I would be willing to meet and discuss this matter with delegates from these regions, or with any interested person.
3. Finally, I recommend that the Working Group for Indigenous Peoples send a strong and condemning message to the Government of Australia, both on a Federal and State level, that this groups sees these actions as a clear violation of the basic Human Rights of the Indigenous peoples of Australia and that this forum demands that the Australian Government in all its form, adhere to the International Conventions, ^{which protect the rights of all peoples} especially ~~all~~ ^{the} conventions that it is party to, which ~~protect the rights of the indigenous peoples of Australia.~~ ^{which is being denied to us.}

Thank you Madame Chair.

* Delivered by Mervyn Traney
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