

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
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Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

It is with grave concern that I write this submission urging the Government to reconsider its plan to extend any aspect of the Northern Territory Emergency Response ("The Intervention").

I believe there is no more critical issue in Australia today than what is happening to Indigenous people under the NT Intervention ! I have seen it with my own eyes and I am well aware of the devastating impact it is having on these beautiful people, their children and their communities.

I have observed Indigenous people, living in these affected communities, starving and freezing, in substandard housing, more than four years on since the Intervention began ! Many are eating every second day, not because of any mismanagement on their part but because of government oppression, dictating where they can purchase their food and essential items, forcing many to travel up to hundreds of kilometres for food and clothing. This is simply unacceptable and it is wrong !

The Intervention continues to have a serious affect on the mental health of Indigenous people in the NT, with a marked increase in suicides. Homelands are a critical part of an Indigenous person's identity and wellbeing, yet Indigenous people in the affected areas are being systematically driven off their homelands, in spite of them being sources of great physical and spiritual nourishment. Any new focus should be about enabling Indigenous people to remain on their homelands.

It is pertinent to highlight the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association's (AIDA) report 'Health Impact Assessment of the Northern Territory Emergency Response 2010' which predicted that "the intended health outcomes of the NTER (improved health and wellbeing, and ultimately, life expectancy) are unlikely to be fully achieved through the NTER measures. It is predicted that it will leave a negative legacy on the psychological and social wellbeing, on the spirituality and cultural integrity of the prescribed communities." This prediction has become a reality and is surely evident today. Indeed AIDA's report referred to "External leadership, governance, and control" as having "...profound long-term negative impacts on psychological health, social health and wellbeing and cultural integrity." Again, the damage is evident.

And that " the Intervention has diminished its own chances of succeeding in improving the health and wellbeing of children and communities through its failure to engage constructively, respectfully, and fully with the Aboriginal people it was intended to help.

Seriously limited consultation has taken place with Indigenous communities and there is insufficient evidence to support the Intervention. Moreover, you would be well aware of the UN and international condemnation of this policy, and yet, this Government seeks to continue its tirade on Aboriginal people, in spite of this. I urge the Government to reconsider any extension of this flawed policy.

Furthermore, any thought given to extending such a paternalistic policy makes a mockery of The Apology, in which the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd spoke of building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—“a bridge based on a real respect rather than a thinly veiled contempt”. Any extension of these measures will do untold damage to our relationship with Indigenous Australians and will only serve to set the clock back even further.

However, a new year presents itself with a new opportunity to make this right, and as such, I implore your Government to institute an immediate end to the NT Intervention and commence meaningful, respectful dialogue with Aboriginal communities at once, in the spirit of self-determination.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Yours Faithfully,

Ms Inga Lie