

Whether you like it or not, our future, our humanity and our freedom are irrevocably bound to our treatment of the First Peoples of Australia.

That we have continued to disrespect and dishonour the First Peoples, and ignore and deny their perspectives and beliefs in relation to policies directly related to their lives and wellbeing is unacceptable and offensive to us all as Australian citizens.

Until we all enjoy equity under the law, until justice is afforded to all, none of us are liberated, none of us belong to a truly democratic nation, and none of us are absolved of the responsibility to push for justice for all.

It is easy to be apathetic about these issues, but you cannot ignore the fact that racial injustice engulfs this country. Whatever affects one person directly, affects all indirectly.

As a great man said, and I never tire of reading the source, "...freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor. It must be demanded by the oppressed." (The source is Martin Luther King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail).

While the First Peoples of Australia are oppressed, we all share in their oppression. The legislation of the Northern Territory Intervention is unjust. If we sit back and allow the expansion of this legislation under the Stronger Futures measures, then we are making a decision to allow oppression and injustice to continue. To be silent is to support these injustices; breaking up Aboriginal control and Aboriginal culture, moving people off their lands, and forced assimilation into 'mainstream' Australia.

We look back on the era of the Stolen Generations and we regret the close-minded racism that produced these policies, and the devastating effect this had on Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal Peoples lives. But we are making similar mistakes now, and at a time when we claim to be a liberal democracy - when we invade other countries seeking to impose our ideal political institutions and social values. Don't assume that because you do not have to deal with the repercussions of this legislation directly that it does not affect you; the Northern Territory legislation has demonised Aboriginal Peoples. It has affected non-Aboriginal peoples views of Aboriginal Australia in a wholly negative way.

Many Aboriginal People forced to comply with the legislation under the NT Intervention draw a comparison between their current circumstances and those of the mission days - a time when children were being forcibly removed, people were being made to deny their Aboriginality and assimilate into 'mainstream' society, mission managers controlled rations as well as every detail of Aboriginal Peoples lives, and Aboriginal People were still not counted as citizens and had no voting rights. The similarities are undeniable.

The Australian government must engage in genuine consultations and negotiation with Aboriginal communities in "prescribed areas" to create progressive legislation that includes the views, values and wishes of Aboriginal Peoples. Without this consultation, Australian governments are simply perpetuating discriminatory attitudes and policies towards our First Peoples.

Please reconsider the Stronger Futures legislation on the grounds that there has been no genuine consultation with Aboriginal communities in prescribed areas, and the knowledge that until this is done your policies will fail.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Hooper.