

7 November 2008

a statement from the National Council of Churches in Australia



The following statement was endorsed by the Executive of the National Council of Churches in Australia at its meeting on 6 November 2008.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ALSO HAVE THE RIGHT TO DIGNITY AND JUSTICE

In recognition of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10th 2008, the member Churches of the NCCA affirm their commitment to dignity and justice for all, and in particular for our Indigenous brothers and sisters.

With great vision the creators of the UDHR enshrined the knowledge that we are all born with inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights. The theme for this year's commemoration reminds us of this great truth and calls us to take action where we see injustice and to treat each other with the dignity and respect inherent in our humanity.

We are reminded however that 60 years after creating this potent statement of human rights, Indigenous Australians have cause to question whether dignity and justice has really been for all. The Churches have always believed that humankind is created in God's image and that we must respect and love each other no matter who we are or where we are from. We acknowledge that we too have had to examine our own past relationships with Indigenous peoples and understand where we have failed to recognize and respect God's likeness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We look to the future with hope and believe that this moment in time represents a critical juncture in how we, as a nation, relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognize the high level of political and popular will to create real and lasting change. We recognize and congratulate the Federal Government on their stated commitment to addressing Indigenous disadvantage, one aspect of achieving dignity and justice. We believe that the Federal Government has voiced a sincere commitment to a new and reinvigorated approach to ending Indigenous poverty.

However, we are concerned that without a meaningful and far reaching re-visioning of our relationship with Indigenous peoples and an overt commitment to a human rights led development agenda that we are doomed to repeat past mistakes and wrongs.

We urge the Government to ensure that the human rights of Indigenous Australians are safeguarded and their citizen rights upheld. Policy solutions must ensure that individual rights are protected. We therefore ask the Government to ensure that all policy measures, including the Northern Territory Emergency Response, adhere to the Racial Discrimination Act. Further, we urge the Government to explicitly show their support for Indigenous rights by signing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Then we can be sure we are moving towards Dignity and Justice for all.

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