

**From:** Marlene Hodder  
**Sent:** Friday, 30 May 2008 12:29 PM  
**To:** Committee, RRIC (SEN)

**Subject:** Senate Select Committee - Regional and remote Indigenous communities

I wish to make the following submission to the Senate Select Committee's inquiry into the effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

Firstly I would like to explain that I am a qualified Community Welfare Worker and have had experience, through my employment roles and personally, with Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia over the past 40 years. My experience confirms that the method in which the Northern Territory Intervention is being implemented is completely wrong.

Whilst acknowledging that the child health checks are a good thing (even though such checks have been carried out in the past to a large extent), without a holistic approach as well as important medical follow-up, the exercise is pointless. By holistic I mean that health is related to lifestyle. Therefore there needs to be adequate housing, good food, safety from harm and security within the family, and education, particularly about healthy living and risk avoidance. In the past the latter would have been learnt as a matter of course with the traditional lifestyle of children learning from parents, and the taboos taught by elders. With rapid social change there is need for education both of children and their parents.

Education in the broader sense needs to be delivered in the appropriate cultural context to achieve best outcomes.

Children need emotional security. This is jeopardised by the stress under which many parents are placed by the imposition of the Northern Territory Intervention. People are confused and puzzled as to why these measures are being imposed on them. They are demoralised and being demonised by the media and by the offensive huge blue and white signs at the entrance to many communities and on public highways. Children witness their parents' frustration with Centrelink problems and the difficulties caused by income management.

The upsurge of blatant racism that the setting aside of the Racial Discrimination Act is creating is hard to quantify but it is apparent. Even I, as a non-Aboriginal person, have witnessed it. Aboriginal people living in Mparntwe-Alice Springs are experiencing it.

The greater police presence in Mparntwe-Alice Springs may produce higher statistics for motor vehicle infringements, drunk and disorderly arrests etc or a reduction in violence (a good thing). What is not evidenced in statistics is the effect of home invasions, overbearing and intimidating questioning of children by police wanting information, police breaking in on children in the shower or the toilet, the disturbing of elderly people in the early hours of the morning and so on.

The essential ingredient that is missing from the Northern Territory Intervention is the right of Indigenous people (under this country's Human Rights obligations) to be consulted on matters affecting them and their lives. The government's stance, in complicity with the Opposition, in continuing this racist intervention into Northern Territory communities is an indictment on our country and a disgrace in the eyes of the international community.

Marlene Hodder