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This is the newsletter of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) which is a commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA).

Christ and Culture: Mother Tongue Theologising

Registration is now open for the third NATSIEC Christ and Culture Conference. Details at

www.ncca.org.au/natsiec

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Human Rights Day 2010

As we celebrate Human Rights day in 2010 we are reminded of the many individuals who suffer human rights abuses around the world. We also celebrate the many people who shine a light on these abuses and whose efforts to stand up for the rights of others are often unrecognised. NATSIEC pays particular respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their continuing struggles against oppression and attacks on culture, lands and peoples.

In 2010, Australia is a country that has much to be proud of, but we can not shy away from examining our shadow, those areas where we are failing to protect our citizens from abuse. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are having their rights violated on a daily basis. Whether it is through racism or through discriminatory public policies the rights of many Indigenous Australians are often compromised.

Although Australia does not have a Bill of Rights we are signatories to a number of International Human Rights instruments which should guide us to protect the rights of those most vulnerable. In particular, Australia now supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration). We now need to ensure that the principles of the Declaration are brought into Australian law and policy. No legislation that affects the Indigenous peoples of this country should be enacted unless it has been subjected to scrutiny through the lens of the Declaration.

One policy area that urgently needs to be scrutinized using the Declaration framework is the Northern Territory (NT) Intervention.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has said the Intervention continues to discriminate on the basis of race. During a recent visit NATSIEC undertook to Aboriginal communities in the NT, we heard personal stories of discrimination and racism. Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra OAM, from Galiwin'ku who had recently returned from Geneva where he talked to CERD said about the Intervention:

It's the most evil and most racist (policy) ever established. The Government report to CERD said ok - they are happy people. It's a lie!

One of the most discriminatory aspects of the NT Intervention was the roll back of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA), which ensured that many aspects of the Intervention were excluded from the protection of the RDA. On December 31st legislation which is supposed to reinstate the RDA in full will come into effect. Despite the Government's repeated statements that this new legislation will ensure that the rights of NT Aboriginal people will be protected in full, we are not confident that this is true.

There are still several areas which remain as "special measures" and there remains

a distinct lack of consultation on all aspects of the Intervention. Despite Government rhetoric the benefits of the Intervention remain questionable. The means of attaining these supposed benefits are outrageous in a democratic country which prides itself on the concept of a "fair go". We have the knowledge, we have the resources, but we do not seem have the will to implement policies which will celebrate and empower Aboriginal peoples.

The media, and through them the public, often accept at face value the Government statements which tell us that things are improving in the NT while conveniently ignoring the voices of the people affected; the stories of suffering and anguish caused by these measures. We must take notice of what people are experiencing; how much longer are we going to stand by and let these things happen?

We must question the need for these special measures; we must question why Aboriginal communities are being pressured to trade land title for housing, education and health. Do they not have the right to expect Government to provide these things - as does every other Australian citizen? We should be suspicious of the rhetoric around the "problems" of Aboriginal communities and we should fight against any attempts to diminish the capacity of Aboriginal communities to make decisions for themselves and their futures.

People often ask me "what can I do?" There is plenty each and every one of us can do; start right here and now. Today, on human rights day we are being asked to "Speak up: Stop discrimination". To speak up it's necessary to ask questions and look beyond the superficial, listen to the people and take action.

You could start by watching an excellent film called Our Generation. This is an important film which gives voice to those people affected by the Intervention. Go to <http://www.ourgeneration.org.au/> to find out when a community screening is being held in your area. If there isn't one, buy the DVD and organize one.

One of the key messages in the Make Indigenous Poverty History campaign was to Remember, Recognise and Rectify. We need to Remember the past, to know a true and honest picture of what has gone before. We need to Recognise what is still going on today; to understand that colonization and discrimination are alive and well around the country. Most importantly we need to Rectify. It's not enough to know about something, we must take action. It may be as simple as challenging an ignorant statement at a dinner party or it may be taking to the street; writing to the Prime Minister; visiting your local MP. It doesn't have to be big, but it has to be something. Nobody in Australia can say "we didn't know" - we do know and each and every one of us is responsible to take an action to help end discrimination and racism. So on Human Rights Day 2010, I hope you will join us at NATSIEC in speaking up and saying no to discrimination and yes to human rights for all.

Graeme Mundine, Executive Secretary, NATSIEC

Find out more about the RDA - read the NATSIEC briefing note on our website.

<http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/natsiec/advocacy/issues>

From the news wire...

Did you know that NATSIEC now has a blog? You can go there for more regular updates.

[NATSIEC Blog](#)

Disclaimer

NATSIEC provides this newsletter to share information about issues which affect and concern Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The views contained in this

newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views or position of either NATSIEC or the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Martung Upah Appeal



The *Make Indigenous Poverty History* Campaign is an initiative of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC). Other projects run by NATSIEC include the Indigenous Theology project and a development fund.

NATSIEC receives significant funding from *Act of Peace* and the *Uniting Church (NSW) 2% fund*, however the rest of our funding comes from donations by Churches and Individuals to its annual appeal Martung Upah*.

By supporting the Martung Upah appeal you are joining us in a partnership to engage Churches and the wider community in fostering a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Together we can work towards healing the hurts of the past and building a better tomorrow for all our children so that injustice and discrimination will not be part of Australia's future.

We thank you for your support.

To download go to the Martung Upah Appeal webpage [click here](#).

To go direct to the online donation page [click here](#)

* Martung Upah is from Western Australia and means partnership.