

NO to another Decade of Discrimination

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The answer is NO !

Yolgnu leaders across the Top End have said they will refuse to sign leases in exchange for the promise of housing and will defy the federal government's ten year extension of the NT Intervention.

The 2nd Yolgnu Nations Assembly [Yolgnu Makarr-Dhuni] also called for equal funding for the development of homelands and the larger ex-mission towns, an end to the punishment of parents whose children miss school, and scrapping of the Super Shire Councils that have robbed communities of their voice and control.

After a march through the streets of Maningrida to symbolise the long journey towards genuine self-determination and democracy, men and women representing eight Yolgnu nations in Arnhem Land held many hours of discussions from October 11th-13th culminating in a communiqué:

"We are being led around like dogs on a lead with the Basics Card, compulsory acquisition of our land, police coming into our homes without a warrant, and having our law disqualified from recognition in court. All this was done and continues to be done under the lie that we are hiding paedophiles and that child abuse comes from our culture. This is disrespectful, slanderous and fundamentally untrue. It is undermining our law, our culture and our whole identity. All this so Government can get legitimacy for taking over our communities. We demand an apology from the Federal Government."

Yolgnu leaders including the Reverend Dr Djinyini Gondarra, Matthew Dhulumburk Gaykamangu, Mark Yingiya Guyula and Helen Nyomba Gandangu also met with the Northern Territory's new CLP Chief Minister, Terry Mills.

Djinyini Gondarra indicated that the Yolgnu were encouraged by the Chief Minister's effort to listen to their concerns and his promise to work with them on their demands. The Yolgnu leaders called on Mr Mills to lobby the Federal Government to listen to voices on the ground and immediately end the Intervention.

The Yolgnu elders told the Chief Minister that they want genuine input into the policies that affect their children's lives.

"We acknowledge that neglect sometimes happens but it is not a simple issue of unruly children or negligent parents. Our parents are suffering from a deep collective depression due to disempowerment. Our kids can't see a vision of their own future....This depression is leading to devastation. The self-harm and suicide rate is 5 times higher than before the Intervention. These are our children that are paying with their lives for the false accusations and assimilationist policies."

Despite calls by the Northern Territory and Queensland governments for a possible easing of discriminatory alcohol restrictions in remote communities, the Yolgnu leaders stressed lessons learned from their own long experience of voluntary or self-declared "dry communities".

"Many of our communities were self-nominated dry communities for decades before the Intervention. We refuse to be collectively branded as having problems with alcohol abuse because it was our decision to be alcohol free and we enforce that. A few communities decided to introduce various permit systems that regulate the amount, the strength and the regularity of alcohol that permit holders are allowed to purchase. People who are found to be abusing this system have their permits taken from them. Our dry areas and alcohol permit systems must stay, this is the responsible will of our people."

The Yolgnu Nations Assembly is attempting to forge a new working relationship with both the Northern Territory Government and the NT police. It is proposed that police go through far more thorough training to understand the strengths of traditional Madayin law and that there should be more local police to build better relationships with the Arnhem Land communities. To give back the community's sense of control they want local organisations to build and maintain housing, providing jobs for local people rather than fly-in, fly-out government contractors.

The gathering in Maningrida was the second time the Yolgnu leaders have assembled after deciding a year ago that it was time for Arnhem Land to assert its voice.