

MEDIA RELEASE

PM Rudd urged to accept UN criticism of 'racist' NT Intervention

Church leaders and other concerned Australians today called on the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to demonstrate his Government's support for the United Nations role in protecting human rights by accepting its criticism of the Northern Territory Intervention as 'racist' and in need of significant reform.

The criticisms were made by Prof. James Anaya, the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Human Rights, who left Australia today after an eleven day tour which gave considerable focus to the Intervention in the Northern Territory and resulted in his declaring it racist.

His time spent in the Northern Territory included visits to the Aboriginal communities of Alice Springs, Yuendumu, Darwin, Yirrkala, Ramangirr, Groote Eylandt and Bagot providing the Rapporteur with opportunities to sit with, and listen to the concerns of, local peoples and their elders.

Several thousand concerned Australians, including many Aboriginal people from the NT, had signed letters asking Professor Anaya to:

- encourage the Australian Government to respect and recognise the views of all Aboriginal people through new and genuine negotiation with Aboriginal elders
- insist that human rights principles as outlined in the UN Convention against Racial Discrimination be applied
- encourage the Government to re-instate the Racial Discrimination Act without discriminatory "special measures".

Last thursday Prof Anaya gave a statement to a press conference at the National Library in Canberra in which he stated that in his journey of listening and learning in Australia, he had observed "the need to develop new initiatives and reform existing ones - in consultation and in real partnership with indigenous people - to conform with international standards requiring genuine respect for cultural identity and self determination".

Professor Anaya advised that, in its current form, "the Emergency Response is incompatible with Australia's obligation's under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, treaties to which Australia is a party, as well as incompatible with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People." He stated that the associated special measures, "overtly discriminated against Aboriginal peoples, infringe their right of self-determination and stigmatize already stigmatized communities."

The Australian Government has already indicated its intention to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act in the NT and the process leading to reform of the Intervention is already underway. Will government take guidance from Prof. Anaya? Our Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has consistently declared his support for the United Nations. Now is the time to show that support and to ensure the world that Australia is prepared to take the necessary steps to safeguard the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination and cultural integrity by removing the discriminatory elements of the current arrangements.

Anglican Bishop Greg Thompson of Darwin urges the Federal Government of Australia, "not to diminish the spirit of the Apology by subverting universal human rights of First Australians in the Northern Territory. Such a policy foundation based on coercion is a return to the repertoires of

