



IEUA STATEMENT RE CURRENT INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

The fact that Australia's Aboriginal peoples remain at the bottom level of every economic, health and social indicator is unacceptable and should be a source of national shame.

Changing this must be a national priority and Australians need to commit to support courageous policy to tackle together the issues that continue to divide this country.

Policy, legislation, commentary and neglect over the last decade have fundamentally challenged the achievements in the last decades of the 20th century, from the 1967 Referendum, to Land Rights, Mabo and Wik.

The IEUA believes that after 11 years of government the public has every right to be cynical about the announcement by the Federal Government, the 'law and order' hysteria underpinning the policy and the continuing failure to address other social, educational, health and employment matters.

The Federal Government's grab bag of ill-conceived measures simply seeks to play on community prejudice.

Security of family, of health, of property, of employment along with attention to basic needs such as food and water are as critical, if not more critical than any attention to 'law and order'.

Governments have failed to supply the resources to address the true causes of violence and poverty. The Federal Government's announcements show little capacity to address these fundamental issues.

The IEUA notes the report by Professor Tony Vinson "Dropping Off the Edge" released back in February 2007 that found: "that despite our nation's recent strong economic growth, some communities remain caught in a spiral of low school attainment, high unemployment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse"

The Federal Government's economic and social policies of the last decade have widened the gap between rich and poor in this country and have further exacerbated problems in dysfunctional communities.

No one government or authority can do this alone and a heavy handed approach does not inspire confidence that key groups and people will be engaged in the process. The IEUA echoes the comments by Noel Pearson in developing a "strategy for building Indigenous social and cultural ownership".

Indeed to simply cast complex social issues into a law and order framework does the Indigenous community a disservice and only increases the gap between Indigenous people and the wider community, ultimately leading to further dysfunction and alienation

Accordingly, the IEUA acknowledges the seriousness of health, safety, social and education issues for indigenous peoples. The IEUA believes that Increased resources and support are a long overdue national priority. However, the IEUA believes that the Federal Government's policy seems to be more about a return to the mid 1900's policies of separation and discrimination, and as such should be urgently reviewed.

The IEUA calls on the Federal Government to :

- consult appropriately with the NT government and indigenous communities
- amend its policy particularly in relation to taking over lands owned by indigenous communities