



MEDIA RELEASE

14th September 2007

A TIME TO CELEBRATE?

Last night the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous peoples around the world are celebrating but not in Australia said Mr Councillor, Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation which represents over 140 community controlled health services.

The vote in the 192-member assembly was 143 in favour, four against and 11 abstentions. The four against were Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US. Once again this government has shown its true racist colours.

By opposing this Declaration the Howard government has, once again, signalled to Aboriginal Australians that their rights aren't worth defending, said Mr Councillor.

Not content with merely voting against the Declaration Mr Howard was also personally instrumental in turning the Canadian government against the policy following their election last year. Canada was a strong supporter of the Declaration until Mr Howard's visit in May last year following which they became an outspoken critic very much in line with the Australian position.

This vote is the culmination of over 20 years of debate at the United Nations.

This is a non-binding declaration protecting the human, land and resources rights of the world's 370 million indigenous people. It also recognises the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and sets global human rights standards for them - in fact, rights of all individuals but as they relate to Indigenous Peoples.

The rights contained in the Declaration are not new. They are rights that have been codified by the UN member states in countless treaties and have existed for the entire life of the UN since the adoption of the universal declaration of Human Rights.

Clearly we can't trust the Howard Coalition to make life fairer for Aboriginal peoples in Australia. It's a sad day for the people I represent.

This government has never shown respect for our human rights. Practical Reconciliation has always been a way to avoid recognising human rights. This just confirms this once again said an angry and frustrated Mr Councillor.

For the Aboriginal peoples of Australia to prosper, for the 17 year life expectancy gap to be closed, we need a government that shows respect for our human rights. How can we trust the government to do the right thing if they will not recognise us as equals?

Partnerships are built on trust. Once again Howard and his government have betrayed our trust by denying our basic human rights.

Background:

Read the Declaration in its full version on the Office of the United National Permanent forum on Indigenous Issues website:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html>

Content of the Declaration

The Declaration is a long and complex document with a preamble and 45 articles, divided into nine sections.

The text recognises the wide range of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples. Among these are the right to unrestricted self-determination, an inalienable collective right to the ownership, use and control of lands, territories and other natural resources, their rights in terms of maintaining and developing their own political, religious, cultural and educational institutions along with the protection of their cultural and intellectual property. The Declaration highlights the requirement for prior and informed consultation, participation and consent in activities of any kind that impact on indigenous peoples, their property or territories. It also establishes the requirement for fair and adequate compensation for violation of the rights recognised in the Declaration and establishes guarantees against ethnocide and genocide.

The Declaration also provides for fair and mutually acceptable procedures to resolve conflicts between indigenous peoples and States, including procedures such as negotiations, mediation, arbitration, national courts and international and regional mechanisms for denouncing and examining human rights violations.

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