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MEDIA RELEASE

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Long term support essential to lasting change in remote Indigenous communities

Anglicare Australia, along with the vast majority of Australians, are deeply concerned at the severity and widespread nature of the problems of child sexual abuse and community breakdown in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, catalogued in the *Little Children are Sacred* Report.

The safety and well-being of all Australian children is paramount. At this moment it is obvious our Indigenous children in remote communities face an unacceptably high risk of abuse and action must be taken immediately to address the issue.

We welcome the Howard government's commitment to tackling issues such as violence and abuse in certain Indigenous communities but stress the need for a longer term plan to address the underlying causes of the problem, including community breakdown, joblessness, overcrowding and low levels of education.

Successfully tackling these problems requires sustainable solutions, which must be worked out with the communities, not prescribed from Canberra.

In their present form the proposals miss the mark and are unlikely to have sustainable effect. There is an over-reliance on top-down and punitive measures, and insufficient indication that additional resources will be mobilised where they are urgently needed; to improve housing, child protection and domestic violence supports, schools, health services, alcohol and drug rehab programs. These issues have been raised by many Indigenous leaders over many years.

As Chair of Anglicare Australia, I wish to express our desire to work collaboratively with Governments and the communities affected to ensure that children are protected.

We offer our support to Indigenous communities and the Government in

- developing programs that will strengthen families and communities to empower them to confront the problems they face
- consulting adequately with the communities and NT Government, community service, health and education providers
- developing a long term plan to address and resolve the causes of child abuse including joblessness, education, parenting and life skills, poor housing, and commit the ongoing necessary resources to this.

Dr Ray Cleary is Chairman of Anglicare Australia

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