

MEDIA RELEASE

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A new independent voice for Aboriginal Australians

A new national political body for Aboriginal Australians, entirely independent from governments, will be established following a three-day gathering held in Alice Springs this week.

A 'fighting fund' will be set up to support the new National Aboriginal Alliance (NAA), with contributions to be sought from Aboriginal people and communities and private sources Australia-wide.

About 100 Aboriginal people from throughout Australia have attended the meeting since Wednesday, including representatives of land councils and legal services, Stolen Generations organisations, health and housing bodies, the national youth forum, media organisations, doctors and Elders, as well as people living in town camps and remote communities and outstations.

The diverse group yesterday agreed upon the principles that will guide and underpin the NAA, and will now return to their communities and organisations to start to build support for the new body.

Those principles include a rejection of the 'discriminatory and coercive elements' of the Commonwealth's so-called 'emergency intervention' in the Northern Territory, which the group believes has little to do with the protection of Aboriginal children.

The group urged Aboriginal peoples and communities to actively but peacefully resist the 'intervention', and demanded:

- the immediate removal of Commonwealth Business Managers from Aboriginal communities in the NT
- that the Commonwealth respects the property rights of Aboriginal people in the NT and restores the permit system
- that the Commonwealth immediately restores integrity to the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, which has been put aside under the Government's 'intervention'.
- that Aboriginal communities receive equitable service delivery and infrastructure.

The group affirmed its commitment to protecting Aboriginal children from harm, adding that successive Australian governments had ignored Aboriginal peoples' repeated cries for help.

"There is not a single reference to child protection in the hundreds of pages that comprise the Commonwealth's legislative package," the group said. "Rather than protecting children, this so-called 'emergency intervention' is a cynical attempt to subject our people to further genocide."

The group said the lack of national political representation for Aboriginal people since the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) had left Aboriginal people vulnerable to harsh government policies and practices.

“These attacks against Aboriginal people in the NT are a consequence of the lack of representation,” it said. “Had there been a powerful black political voice in place, we doubt these attacks could have succeeded.

“We call upon all Aboriginal people to walk in the footsteps of our Elders whose legacies are now at stake and whose victories are being wound back. We must stand united to seize back the power to shape our own destinies.

“We call on all Australians, to engage with, speak up and support Aboriginal people’s self-determination.”

NITV CEO Pat Turner said this week’s meeting had laid important foundations.

“This is something we hope that all of our brothers and sisters and the many fair-minded Australians will stand shoulder to shoulder with us on,” she said.

“This is the beginning of resistance,” said Tasmanian participant Michael Mansell. “Finally, a national voice of dissent and one that will offer leadership instead of black bashing.”

NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) Chairwoman, Bev Manton, said her organisation and its 23,000 members were appalled by the Howard government’s actions in the NT.

“We have supported the Aboriginal people of the NT since John Howard announced this so-called intervention,” Ms Manton said. “We have agreed to continue this support in financial terms, for three to six months, and will be actively involved in the newly formed National Aboriginal Alliance.

“I urge, encourage and call upon everyone to financially support the NAA to establish a fighting fund to develop a plan of attack against this invasion. By Howard’s actions, he has reignited the fire in our bellies and united Aboriginal people across Australia.”

Gunditjmara Elder from Victoria, Alma Thorpe, agreed and urged her fellow Victorians to support the NAA and, through it, the Aboriginal people of the NT.

“I am greatly encouraged by this new national body and I intend to be a part of it,” she said. “We must declare and show by our actions that enough is enough.”

Pastor Geoffrey Stokes, a Wongatha man from Kalgoorlie in Western Australia, said the Australian system of government had not worked for Aboriginal people.

“We need a body that can express our aspirations in our way,” he said. “We need the support of other Australians too, about what happens to our people.

“It is time that we as Aboriginal people take our rightful place in this country, it is time that we and our cultural heritage are treated with respect.”

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**Resolutions of the National Aboriginal Alliance
Pioneer Football Club, Stuart Highway, Alice Springs
12-14 September 2007**

1. We celebrate the hundreds of years of struggle by our people to maintain our cultural integrity, protect our lands, and fulfill our obligations to future generations. Our Alliance will continue this powerful tradition of activism to determine our own futures as proud and strong Aboriginal people.
2. The lack of national political representation for Aboriginal people has left us vulnerable to harsh government policies, and these attacks against Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are a consequence of the lack of representation. Had there been a powerful black political voice in place, we doubt these attacks could have succeeded.
3. This national gathering of over 100 people from all parts of Australia recognises the need for an independent national political voice. The National Aboriginal Alliance is established to provide that voice.
4. We affirm our profound commitment to protecting our children from harm. We acknowledge those within our communities who fought for decades to address the complicated issue of child abuse, and we deplore the successive Australian governments who ignored our cries for help.
5. We reject outright the discriminatory and coercive elements of the Commonwealth's invasion ('emergency intervention') in the Northern Territory.
6. The Racial Discrimination Act has only ever been suspended on three occasions – each time to erode the rights of Aboriginal people. This previously occurred in 1998 with the Native Title Amendment Act and the Hindmarsh Island Bridge legislation. We demand that the Commonwealth immediately restore integrity to the Racial Discrimination Act.
7. We demand the immediate removal of Commonwealth Business Managers from Aboriginal communities in the NT. They are comparable to the missionaries and police protectors who exercised despotic control over our forebears and therefore, have no place in our lives. We urge our peoples and communities to actively resist in a peaceful way the so-called intervention in the Northern Territory.
8. We demand that the Commonwealth respect the property rights of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, including the right to control access to our lands through the permit system; rights that generations of our people fought to secure, often in the face of fierce opposition.
9. We demand that the Commonwealth respect the expertise and independence of our community organizations. There is not a single reference to child protection in the hundreds of pages that comprise the Commonwealth's legislative package. Rather than protecting children, this so-called 'emergency intervention' is a cynical attempt to subject our people to further genocide.

10. Many of the socio-economic problems in our communities are the legacies of decades of chronic under-funding in essential service delivery and infrastructure. We demand that our communities receive the equitable services delivery and infrastructure that is our entitlement.
11. We call upon all Aboriginal people to walk in the footsteps of our Elders whose legacies are now at stake and whose victories are being wound back. We must stand united to seize back the power to shape our own destinies.
12. We call on all Australians, to engage with, speak up and support Aboriginal people's self-determination.