



Leaders of the Congregations and Provinces of the Sisters of St Joseph, Australia

MEDIA STATEMENT

MUCH STILL TO BE DONE TO SHOW WE ARE TRULY SORRY

As the second anniversary of the government's Apology to the Stolen Generations approaches, the Leaders of the Congregations of the Sisters of St Joseph in Australia have written to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs asking that the legislation before parliament re-instating the Racial Discrimination Act in relation to the Northern Territory Intervention does so in spirit as well as in fact.

Speaking on behalf of 1200 Sisters of St Joseph across Australia, Sr Anne Derwin said 'Two years ago we, along with the majority of Australians, welcomed the apology given by the government to the members of the Stolen Generations, we rejoiced with Aboriginal people in finally hearing the word 'sorry'. We have also welcomed government initiatives that begin to Close the Gap in relation to Aboriginal disadvantage, and the intention of the government to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act in relation to the Intervention legislation.'

'The Racial Discrimination Act requires that legislation does not negatively impact on a particular group of people identifiable by race, and should this occur the measures involved must necessarily be for the wellbeing of the people affected, appropriate for the intended purpose, and the informed consent obtained of people affected by the measures.

'We share with Aboriginal people their disappointment that income management in the new legislation appears to only technically comply with the Racial Discrimination Act. Aboriginal people have consistently expressed the wish that income be managed on a voluntary basis, or that local communities decide on an individual's income management based on his/her adherence to agreed standards of behaviour. Just not targeting a particular group does not make a measure non-discriminatory if its effect has a greater impact on a particular people. From July this year income management will apply, in the first instance, to all welfare recipients in the Northern Territory, and it is well known that the vast majority of welfare recipients in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal,' Sr Anne said.

'We are also concerned that many aspects of the Northern Territory Intervention will remain as so-called Special Measures. This has led to considerable disquiet among Aboriginal people, and indicates that the measures have not yet been adequately demonstrated to them to be necessary for their wellbeing. To comply with the Racial Discrimination Act, Aboriginal people need to be consulted about the measures, and many believe that the concerns they voiced about Special Measures were ignored during the recent consultation process.

'The reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act is an issue of importance for all Australians. In a society such as ours we ought to be able to expect not be treated differently on the basis of our race.

'We call on all members of parliament to unite in ensuring that the legislation currently before them goes beyond a minimal compliance with the requirements of the Act and restores to Aboriginal people the rights they ought to enjoy as citizens of this nation.' Sr Anne concluded.

February 11, 2010

For comment: Contact Sr Laraine Crowe 0400 436 947