30/1/2012

Carmen Robinson

To whom it may concern,

Re: Submission into the Proposed Stronger Futures set of legislation.

I object to the proposed Stronger Futures legislation on the basis that it is racist, punitive, lacking in evidence and will not work. It is no improvement on the much condemned Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) or Intervention.

The Intervention does not work to improve wellbeing for Aboriginal people because it is an aggressive assault of assimilation that does not recognize or acknowledge how in the context of poverty and colonialism, punitive coercive policies will only worsen conditions and increase suffering.

People are feeling traumatized, humiliated and let down by government. I live in Alice Springs and can see an Apartheid situation around me. I have seen segregated lines at the supermarkets and at Centrelink since the Government targeted Aboriginal people with income management and the Basics card.

Since the NTER started, nearly five years ago, self harm and suicide has increased to more than double, compared to before the NTER. Unemployment has risen, incarceration rates have hit the roof and school attendance has decreased in many places. People are still living in poverty in overcrowded houses and the number of children removed from families has risen.

Through the Intervention, the government has done its best to force Aboriginal people to assimilate, in its systematic attempts to dismantle community control and seize control over land, assets, individual and community income, shops, schools, Community Development Employment Programs, alcohol management plans and the practice of Cultural Law.

The proposed Stronger Futures legislation seeks to expand and extend the NTER for 10 more years. It seeks more control over communities and individuals and their land and culture. It is paternalistic and ignores in its approach, the strong links between autonomy and self-pride; and health and economic improvements on both an individual and community level.

I personally attended several of the Stronger Futures Consultations and heard what people said and asked for. People wanted self determination, self governance and for the government to RESPECT their people, culture and laws. They were asking for their communities to be better resourced and self managed, like most other communities in Australia enjoy.

The Stronger Futures Legislation makes no attempts to redress any of these things or empower Aboriginal people in its agenda. Rather, the policy is disempowering, hence, there

has been no genuine consultation or collaboration. People were not listened to and it is for this reason, that this legislation and government will fail Aboriginal people once again.

The issue of school attendance raised interconnected issues relating to poverty and oppression. People had many good suggestions for improving school attendance. Suggestions included the employment of more local teachers that children can relate to; allowing kids to speak their own language at school; teaching culturally appropriate material; better housing to improve the overcrowding situations at home that impact on the health and wellbeing of a child and for many reasons make it hard for kids to get to school; more affordable healthy food in the stores, to improve the health and energy levels of kids.

The government has ignored all of those ideas, preferring the punitive approach of financial penalty. The government seemingly has no interest in attempting to help remove those obvious barriers to school attendance and so school attendance will continue to fall. Punishing the guardians of children who miss more than 5 days of school in a term with the suspension of social security payments is a lazy, unintelligent and callous approach.

People are in poverty and suffering its complex effects because of intergenerational, systematic oppression. The government must stop disempowering and punishing people.

There has been broad opposition to the punitive measures of the Intervention and now the Stronger Futures set of Legislation from Aboriginal organisations, social service providers, education and health experts, and NGOs, both nationally and internationally.

I urge the government to withdraw this expensive, racist series of Intervention/Stronger Futures legislation and instead use the money to fund empowering initiatives that are designed, directed and owned by Aboriginal people.

Sincerely,

Carmen Robinson