

07

Taking action





Former Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma, Amnesty International National Director Claire Mallinson and Indigenous rights campaigner Rodney Dillon hold copies of the Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples at Yabun Festival, January 2010. © AI

RESOURCE PACKAGE CONTENTS

The accompanying website, www.amnesty.org.au/wheredoyoustand, includes the following PDFs and worksheets:

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02 Indigenous rights: Starting points for discussion

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- 2.2 Where do you stand? Discussing the issues through cartoons
- 2.3 Investigating media coverage of Indigenous issues
- 2.4 Indigenous rights in the media
- 2.5 Telling the story of Indigenous rights in Australia
- 2.6 Patterns in Indigenous and non-Indigenous relation
- 2.7 Exploring the timeline of Indigenous and non-Indigenous history

03 The intervention and human rights

Worksheets:

- 3.1 The Amperlatwaty walk-off
- 3.2 The intervention and human rights

04 Land and Indigenous Peoples' rights

Worksheets:

- 4.1 Debates about land in Australian history
- 4.2 Land and Indigenous rights

05 The Northern Territory Intervention: the media debate

This section includes Worksheet 5.1 Analysing and responding to different points of view and 16 worksheets each relating to specific articles

06 Cartoons

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respectfully advised that this resource contains images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be deceased.

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Today, and since the introduction of the intervention in 2007, Indigenous Peoples across the Northern Territory are facing a renewed and sustained level of destruction and denial of our basic human rights under the Federal Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response, introduced under the guise of protecting children ... The policies that were developed, passed through parliament quickly ... are having serious and detrimental effects on Aboriginal People across the NT ...

Release the chains of control; give us our freedom; let us walk once again as free human beings on this earth (our mother), with our ancestors, spirits, songs, and ceremonies ...

We have an opportunity and one chance in our lifetime to get it right. Let your hearts guide you, not your government policies which are at the core of the destruction of Aboriginal people.¹

People need to stand up and say "No, this is not right for Australia. What kind of country are we living in?"

Richard Downs, leader of the Ampilatwatya walk-off in the NT²

HOMELANDS CAMPAIGN

Don't abandon Aboriginal homelands

Aboriginal families are strongest when they can stay connected to their homelands – but right now the government is stripping funds for essential services from traditional Aboriginal homelands. To find out more and get involved, visit <http://www.amnesty.org.au/indigenous-rights/homelands/>

1 Intervention Walk-Off blog, August 23 2009. Statement by Richard Downs. Retrieved from <http://interventionwalkoff.wordpress.com/statements/>

2 Gosford, B. February 24 2010. 'The Ampilatwatja Walk-Off – Richard Downs on the new 'dog-licenses' and more', interview with Richard Downs Crikey.com. Retrieved from <http://blogs.crikey.com.au/northern/2010/02/24/the-ampilatwatja-walk-off-richard-downs-on-the-new-dog-licenses-and-more/>

“It cannot be left to governments alone...”

In a speech, entitled ‘Can Australia afford not to be reconciled?’ Pat Dodson³ states:

On the occasion of the national apology, we gave the world and ourselves a brief glimpse of who, as a nation, we might yet become ...

There is much work to be done and there are tasks aplenty for all of us. It cannot be left to governments alone to determine the solutions to the problems confronting our communities and people. In that model resides further paternalism, assimilation and welfarism, when what we all want is wellbeing.

There is, if you will pardon the expression, a place at the coalface for all who choose to engage and there is no rational justification for any Australian to stand out as observers in this journey of dialogue that stands before us – every Australian has something to contribute! Patience, humility, trust and love are required in equal measure. And then we need a very large dollop of courage ...

...The journey from this point will be challenging. We must demand the courage of our leaders and opinion makers to imagine a renewed nation, to be prepared to take and support the many steps towards a true renaissance. This must be a renaissance that is underpinned by Indigenous culture and spirituality, and an Indigenous view of what makes for a successful society and economy ...

The outcomes of the engagement between our peoples are beyond dispute. Many of our Indigenous Peoples remain in poverty and live in third world circumstances, our young men are over-represented in the jails of the nation, and the capacity of our communities to participate fully in the economic life of this country are continually subjugated to the interests of third parties ...

In that light, the reconciliation process is seen by many of our young Indigenous people as just a new framework for assimilation. The strategy for assimilation of our peoples is not a mistake made by low-level bureaucrats on behalf of successive governments who didn't know better. It was and continues to be a deliberate act orchestrated at the highest levels in our society, and no amount of moral posturing can hide that reality. This assimilation I talk of has not been evidenced by equality, but by further control, incarceration and subjugation to norms and values without our consent.

Think about it. Right now, today, some of our greatest living artists, philosophers, spiritual leaders and their families remain subject to the racially inspired Northern Territory National Emergency Response – the intervention. Against that backdrop, any notion of reconciled peoples is a farcical concept.

As long as even one such regime of social oppression remains in place in this country, we remain a subjugated people. As long as a parliament is able to remove some of our most basic rights on a political whim, we remain a subjugated people. If governments, newly elected, retain those same impediments to justice when all the evidence available tells them that the programs and strategies emanating from the oppression are failing to deliver the asserted outcomes, then reconciliation is no longer a national aspiration. It is a ruse to disguise our continued subjugation.

In fact, what remains is simply a manifestation of non-Indigenous peoples' impatience with their own inability to come to terms with the scale of the effort required to truly reconcile the nation.

³ Dodson, P. 2010. 'Can Australia afford not to be reconciled?' Speech delivered at University of New South Wales, November 2010

Dodson's speech concludes with a challenge to Australians:

If, as a nation, we are able to conduct ourselves with courage, love and integrity in the dialogue before us, then the nation will be well served and future generations will not be left wondering why our courage was so lacking that we were unable to confront the truth of our history and to deal with that truth accordingly ...

In answering the question 'Can Australia afford not to be reconciled?' I leave you with three questions:

1. Who am I? Are you the person you think you are? For example, what is your essence as a human being and person?
2. What am I meant to do with my life? In this life how do we do justice for others and ourselves?
3. How am I going to do what I am meant to do?

There are no easy answers. The answers will be right for you if you search honestly. In the context of a new partnership and new relationships this is probably the place to start. Then we can ask it of our country.

There is much work to be done and there are tasks aplenty for all of us. It cannot be left to governments alone ... There is no rational justification for any Australian to stand out as observers in this journey of dialogue that stands before us – every Australian has something to contribute!

Think about it. Right now, today, some of our greatest living artists, philosophers, spiritual leaders and their families remain subject to the racially inspired Northern Territory National Emergency Response – the intervention. Against that backdrop, any notion of reconciled peoples is a farcical concept.

Patrick Dodson



Australian of the Year 2009
Patrick Dodson © AAP/Mark Graham

Make a difference

Indigenous history in Australia since colonisation is full of examples of small groups of people making a difference. This is the message of the song *From little things, big things grow*, which celebrates the dramatic campaign for justice by the Gurindji people in the 1960s and 70s. Paid little or nothing by the British-based Lord Vestey, their strike led to the modern land rights movement.

Australia has a proud record of support for human rights overseas, and the rights of many Australians are well protected. Australia's record in respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples has been a different story.

There have been important steps forward in recognising Indigenous rights. The challenge now is to be part of this process, doing the hard work that is needed to ensure that Australia stops returning to the negative patterns of the past and builds a positive future.

Pat Dodson reminds us that every Australian has something to contribute, and challenges us not to just be observers of what is happening around us.

His challenge is direct: he asks whether or not our courage will be found lacking, whether we are able to confront the truth of our history and whether we will deal with that truth accordingly.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead

Activities

1. Consider your knowledge of the following points.
 - a. Indigenous rights issues in Australia today.
 - b. The history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia.
 - c. How human rights look in practice when they are respected (think about your own rights, the rights of people you know, and the rights of people in society whose rights have been ignored or denied).
 - d. How human rights have been achieved in the past. As well as advances in the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia, you could look at the right of women to vote, the right of adults to vote regardless of the property they own and the rights of black people in South Africa and the United States.
2. Consider the challenges outlined in Pat Dodson's speech and the statements of Richard Downs and other Indigenous leaders.
 - a. What is your response?
 - b. What challenges do you face? How can you take action to support Indigenous rights?
 - c. Discuss your ideas as a group.



Alyawarr leader Richard Downs.
© Jagath Dheerasekar

Taking action

You can create awareness through events, social media, posters, petitions, letters, fundraising, school assemblies, and many other activities.

Here are a few ideas here to get you thinking. But remember: you are only limited by your own imagination, so be creative!

USE YOUR SKILLS

To make change happen, you can use the abilities that you already have and develop new skills. There is a place for people who can:

- talk with others and get them involved
- take photos
- design a website
- create a Facebook page
- design posters and leaflets
- compose headings and text for posters and leaflets
- place posters in eye-catching locations
- distribute leaflets
- answer questions during a radio interview
- broadcast radio interviews
- prepare food (and wash up!)
- write press releases
- speak with people affected by the issues
- ensure people affected by the issues are actively involved in designing a campaign and that

they lead the action, or at least give it a green light after having enough time and information to consider proposals for a campaign. (Amnesty International's campaigns on Indigenous rights have already been through this process at national or regional level – but at your school level, think about the role of Indigenous students and staff in any action on Indigenous rights.)

- ensure people who are not directly affected by the issues, but want to be involved, do not take over a campaign and make all the decisions
- conduct background research
- plan next steps
- talk to the government
- organise meetings
- help resolve conflicts within a group
- ensure decisions made at meetings are carried out
- ensure that decisions made at meetings are realistic to avoid disappointment
- raise funds
- participate in street theatre

- organise music for events
- write and perform new music
- energise a group
- offer new ideas
- create art
- organise a concert
- create a fun environment.

There are many inspiring examples of how human rights have been achieved. You can learn about how change happens and the different contributions that people make by considering examples, such as:

- the Wave Hill Walk Off and the land rights movement
- the 1967 Referendum campaign
- the civil rights movement in the USA
- movements to abolish slavery
- movements to abolish child labour
- the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and around the world
- the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy and how it captured public attention and made non-Indigenous Australians face up to Indigenous rights.



Placing some of the thousands of hands which made up the 'Sea of Hands' outside the Sydney Opera House as part of Corroboree 2000.
© AAP PHOTO/Dean Lewins

RAISE FUNDS

Funds are always needed to make change happen and keep a campaign going.

As a group, discuss ways of raising funds. What do you think people would respond to? You can find additional ideas by searching online for fundraising ideas.

HOST A DISCUSSION

Use the following questions to stimulate discussion.

- Does your school have a reconciliation action plan?
- Do students have the opportunity to hear Indigenous speakers?
- What are other schools doing to recognise Indigenous rights? What might work at your school?
- How could school assemblies be used to focus on Indigenous rights?
- What historical events in Indigenous history could be commemorated at your school?

GET INVOLVED

To contact Amnesty International in your region and find out how you can get involved, visit www.amnesty.org.au/get-involved and click on the link to take action locally.

WRITE LETTERS

Write a letter to the Prime Minister detailing your views on the NT intervention.

- State what you believe should or should not change, explaining your views.
- Show your knowledge of the intervention and your understanding of different perspectives in the debate about the intervention.
- Describe the human rights that are affected.
- Explain what you believe is at stake when these rights are respected or ignored.

Send your letter to

The Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Let us know

Send a copy of your letter to action@amnesty.org.au and hre@amnesty.org.au.

Resources for letter writing:

- Amnesty International writing guide: www.amnesty.org.au/howyoucanhelp/comments/22328/
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights: www.amnesty.org.au/about/comments/21681
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (simple version): www.amnesty.org.au/images/uploads/hrt/Simplified_UDHR.pdf
- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (animated version): <http://tinyurl.com/23lz62w>
- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (text version): www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/declaration.html

All links above are available on our webpage for this resource: www.amnesty.org.au/wheredoyoustand



Amnesty International delivers petition to the Australian High Commission in London, calling on the Australian Government to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act. © AI

CREATE A DISPLAY

You could create a display covering a wall or hallway. It might feature current issues and a detailed timeline of key events in Indigenous and non-Indigenous history in Australia.

Arrange the display so that people can easily use it to look at different themes, such as:

- the experiences of Indigenous people
- the experiences of non-Indigenous people
- quotes from Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- events that have involved steps backwards in relation to rights
- events involving steps forward in recognising Indigenous rights.

Prompt action by:

- highlighting examples of what people have done to create change
- profiling people who are creating change today
- suggesting how people who view the display can respond.

Consider:

- featuring compelling stories of individuals and communities
- including images and symbols that capture people's imagination
- engaging with goals that people already believe in (eg. you could appeal to people's support for the apology to Indigenous Peoples and ask what it means to take this seriously).

For more suggestions for creating a timeline, see *Section 02: Starting points for discussion* of this resource.

ORGANISE AN EVENT

Organise an event such as a school assembly or film screening and invite an Indigenous speaker.

- Gain people's attention. For example, play music; place a table at a location where students gather at lunchtime; make screen-printed T-shirts for participants; create a sculpture in a public space; use posters with strong images and headings.
- Create a sense of involvement and momentum. You can do this by giving a people a job to do.

There is a list of films that you can use under 'useful links' at www.amnesty.org.au/wheredoyoustand

Example

Students belonging to an Amnesty International school group could invite a guest speaker to talk about the Northern Territory intervention, creating posters and leaflets to publicise the event around the school.

After the meeting the group could discuss how to take action to support Indigenous rights, such as agreeing to write to the Prime Minister about their concerns and to speak to one other person about doing the same. A date for the next meeting could be set for a fortnight later. At this meeting the group could decide on the following next steps:

- gather copies of all the letters written and send these to Amnesty International Australia to forward them on the group's behalf
- produce a leaflet for students describing the issues and how they can take action online
- research good DVDs to show at a future lunchtime meeting
- talk with the principal about organising a school assembly on Indigenous rights or a week to recognise Indigenous history and culture.

