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# Canberra

Sunday, 14 October 2007

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## The Canberra Times

14 October 2007

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### Reconciliation 'a political ploy' Focus on rights not referendum

Emily Sherlock

ABORIGINAL women blasted the Prime Minister's reconciliation promise yesterday as too little, too late, damning it as a political ploy and the "death rattle of a dying government".

The women travelled to Canberra from the Northern Territory to discuss the Federal Government's intervention on a trip organised by the group Women for Wik.

They dismissed John Howard's announcement of a referendum to formally recognise indigenous Australians in the Constitution.

One of the women, Eileen Cummings, a former policy adviser to the Northern Territory's Chief Minister, said it was "the death rattle of a dying government".

"He is clutching at straws to stay in power. The Prime Minister has been making statements like this since 1998, but what has he done this time?"

Raelene Rosas, of Darwin, said she did not think much of the proposal, given Mr Howard's history with indigenous affairs.

"Reconciliation? This man has had plenty of opportunities to be able to reconcile with the indigenous people and has not. We are looking at it, and many indigenous people are seeing it as a political ploy."

Indigenous mistrust of the Prime Minister and his policies would make it difficult, if not impossible, for Mr Howard to lead the country to reconciliation as he had announced.

"The vast majority of Aboriginal people don't trust the Prime Minister, or the Indigenous Affairs Minister, Mal Brough. How can this Government lead the country into reconciliation?" Ms Rosas said.

The women said the Government's intervention was hurting Aboriginal communities with many confused and angered by it.

Rachel Willika, of Eva Valley one of the remote communities directly affected by the intervention said it had generated fear among her community.

"Ever since the intervention we have been really concerned about our children and our family," she said through tears.

"They come and gain control of everything in our community and we don't want that, we want to control things our way.

"They have brought fear to me and my family. The first time we heard about it we wanted to go and hide in the bush with our family and children."

Ms Cummings of the Stolen Generation said the intervention had sparked fears that history was repeating itself among older community members.

"It is like when I was 4 and they took me away from the mother that is going back 61 years or so and he is doing the same thing.

"No consultation. What's best for the Aborigines we will do it."

Ms Willika said communities were undergoing hardships with Centrelink payments cut and many feeling as though their rights have been stripped away.

"They just come these people ... I know it is not right, not fair, not to be treated the same as other people in Australia.

"They could have come and talked with us and asked us first, and agree with us first.

"He [John Howard] is a man with no heart at all."

All agreed it was resources medical clinics, suitable housing their communities needed to get back on track, not an intervention.

The women will also travel to Sydney and Melbourne to speak at forums.

"Our message to him is that we are down here talking wherever we can about this intervention because we feel that it needs to be said," Ms Rosas said.

"We are not happy about it."


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