

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD – SATURDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2007

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OLGA HAVNEN

“Intellectually incoherent and inconsistent with his past practices” was how Olga Havnen, chief executive officer of the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory, described John Howard’s U-turn. “This Prime Minister does not have the credibility - or the trust of the Australian people - to lead a genuine process of reconciliation. This is too little, too late.”

Havnen says it is completely at odds with Howard’s interactions with Aborigines over the past 11 years.

“If [he] is genuine in his commitment to reconciliation he must amend immediately the NT Emergency Response legislation and the Native Title Act to remove the racially discriminatory elements of these acts and to restore the integrity of the Racial Discrimination Act,” she says.

Havnen, who is a board member of the Australian Council of Social Services, says that while Howard professes a commitment to “practical” reconciliation to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, “he has failed miserably by any socio-economic measure”.

“The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians has continued to widen under ... his leadership. What we need is genuine engagement to address not only the symbolic and the practical, but also to find accommodation about our legal and political status as first peoples.”

JG



Many concerns ... from left, Eileen Cummings with Rachel Wilka, Shanika Rosas, Raselina Rosas and Malcolm Rosas. The Northern Territory women are in Sydney to speak about the effects of the Federal Government’s intervention in Aboriginal communities. Photo: Ian White