

**10 June 2009**

*from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission*

### **Indigenous Church Leaders Call for Negotiation not Consultation**

Indigenous Church leaders from across Australia have met in Sydney to develop a unified platform for action on the many adverse issues affecting Aboriginal people in the wake of the Northern Territory Intervention.

The forum was hosted by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) with its members attending in solidarity with those of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Alliance (NATSICA).

Executive Secretary of NATSIEC, Mr Graeme Mundine, said there was a clear message from the forum that, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians, we are united against the Northern Territory Intervention in its current form.

“We stand in solidarity with our Northern Territory brothers and sisters and we want to send messages of hope to them” said Mr. Mundine.

Rev. Shane Blackman, CEO of NATSICA, said the Intervention has not, and will not, work for Aboriginal Peoples unless negotiation was front and centre.

“The greatest failing has been the lack of negotiation with Aboriginal Peoples prior to the development and implementation of the Intervention and until such negotiations take place the policy will continue to fail Aboriginal Peoples” said Rev Blackman.

Forum participants asserted the right of Aboriginal Peoples to ‘negotiate agreements as equal partners who have the right to make their own decisions’

They stressed the difference between negotiation at all phases of policy development as distinct from consulting about policies and programs that have already been developed.

Forum participants also commented on the discriminatory nature of the Intervention and called on the Government to immediately reinstate all the suspended provisions of the *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)* and to also ensure that the principles of the United Nation’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are enshrined in Australian Law.

A key outcome of the forum was a forum statement which calls on Governments and Churches to undertake several actions to improve the situation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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The Forum Statement is available at [www.ncca.org.au/natsiec](http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec)

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