

23 June 2006

Ministerial summit no place for egos or partisan politics

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) has written to all Federal, State and Territory Ministers attending next week's summit on violence in Indigenous communities asking that the summit be followed by urgent action tackling the causes of violence.

ANTaR National Director, Gary Highland said the organisation welcomed the summit and acknowledged the need for it to focus primarily on the urgent issues of safety and security.

"Only a bi-partisan approach by Federal, State and Territory Governments working together to tackle violence and its underlying causes will be successful," Mr Highland said.

"There should be no place for egos or partisan politics at the summit because the lives of thousands of Indigenous children are in the balance. ANTaR wishes the summit participants well in their efforts," Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland said ANTaR was concerned about the lack of Indigenous participation in the summit and has asked that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma be invited to attend.

"The recent speech given by Commissioner Calma on violence should be required reading by all Ministers and the summit would benefit greatly from his expertise," Mr Highland said.

ANTaR welcomed Minister Brough's announcement of an audit of policing and safety in remote Indigenous communities, a national investigative unit and better utilisation of local Indigenous women to support police and victims of violence in a culturally appropriate way.

"However, unacceptable levels of violence and abuse extend beyond remote Indigenous communities. We have asked the Minister to include regional and urban Indigenous communities in the audit and other positive initiatives," he said.

Mr Highland urged participating Ministers to follow the summit with comprehensive national action on the underlying causes of violence and abuse in Indigenous communities. This should be a focus of July's Council of Australian Governments meeting.

"In order for this action to succeed where so many other strategies have failed, it will be essential to genuinely involve Indigenous communities in the solutions. This can be done by building on the expertise learnt from programs that have already helped many Indigenous families escape the cycle of violence," Mr Highland said.

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“Any response also needs to condemn the perpetrators but avoid demonising whole communities and cultures. It needs to acknowledge and support the often courageous and innovative efforts of Indigenous people to stamp out the problem in their communities.”

Mr Highland said the summit should be followed by urgent action by Federal, State and Territory Governments on areas including:

- Developing a national framework to identify and prioritise those communities most at risk; identifying key risk factors in these communities and measures needed to diminish these risks; and introducing measures to ensure progress is monitored and reported in a transparent way;
- Setting, priorities, targets and time frames in co-operation with Indigenous communities;
- Developing human rights and responsibilities education that is relevant to Indigenous people and focuses particularly on the areas of violence and abuse;
- Building on the success of Indigenous programs that already work and lifting the capacity of Indigenous communities to take their own action to overcome violence;
- Law reform that focuses primarily on improving reporting and conviction rates;
- More assistance for communities and individuals to overcome the psychological trauma caused by violence;
- Programs to tackle the supply and use of pornography in Indigenous communities;
- Provision of the systemic, long term and properly resourced measures in health, housing and education needed to overcome violence;
- Support for Indigenous communities (including Alice Springs Town Camps) that want to tackle alcohol consumption, petrol sniffing and other forms of substance abuse; and
- Urgent implementation of the recommendations proposed by the recent Senate Inquiry into Petrol Sniffing.

“Following up the summit with action incorporating these elements will be crucial if we are to help Indigenous people defeat the crisis of violence that has overtaken so many communities,” Mr Highland said.

Media contact: Gary Highland on 0418 476 940.