

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Indigenous treatment must be based on fairness, not blind equality

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) today criticised the Prime Minister over his misleading comments relating to the causes of violence such as that at Redfern and Walgett.

“Mr Howard’s comments that strict equality of treatment is the solution are deliberately divisive”, ANTaR National President, Mr Phil Glendenning commented today.

“It is not blind equality of treatment, but **fair treatment** that is the key to addressing Indigenous disadvantage and to strengthening Indigenous families and communities in tackling the causes of violence and dysfunction”.

“It is a tenet of international law and human rights standards that to treat differently-situated groups within a society exactly the same in all contexts is itself discriminatory. Such an approach only perpetuates and entrenches discrimination and disadvantage, fuelling despair and hopelessness within Indigenous communities.

“If we ran society on the basis of blind equality of treatment rather than fair treatment we wouldn’t have the diverse community and economy that underpins Australia’s prosperity and sense of identity. We wouldn’t have a viable farm sector, or services and communities in rural and remote regions. We’d be a diminished nation.

“Instead of blaming Indigenous families and communities, Mr Howard should seek answers from the many inquiries whose recommendations lie ignored and unimplemented by governments.

“If he had done so he would have seen that an approach to law enforcement based on blind equality of treatment would consign the 339 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody to the dustbin. It would further exacerbate the already record levels of Indigenous incarceration and involvement in the criminal justice system, with consequent impacts on Indigenous families and communities.

“If he had taken notice of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Children from Their Families he would know of the intergenerational effects of trauma on stolen generations people in terms of parenting and abusive behavior, and he would have taken urgent steps to address such trauma. He hasn’t done so.

“The real issue is the failure of governments to implement strategies we already know are urgently needed.

“The fact is that the Federal Government has been pushing it’s equal treatment agenda, termed ‘practical’ reconciliation, for the past 8 years now. In that time conditions for Indigenous communities have got worse, not better.

“I’d be angry about that if I was an Indigenous person”, Mr Glendenning commented. “I’d be angry if I knew I had 20 years less life than other Australians just because I was Indigenous.

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