

NORTHERN TERRITORY EMERGENCY RESPONSE- Is the ADF a responsible citizen?

The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) is a program which took effect from the 21st June 2007, the main objective of this program was with military aid to protect Aboriginal children from any abuse and to give them a better future. (Figure 1.) This program was first started by the Howard government after the *Little Children are sacred* report this program is continued by the Rudd government. Since these Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Australia they should have a considerable amount of say in how this country is governed, however this has definitely not happened. The Paternalist values from the 50's can be said to be mirroring what is happening in the Intervention program. The Northern Territory community's wishes are being ignored and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) should not be intervening without adequate collaboration with the Aboriginal elders.

Power

As original inhabitants the Indigenous people should have a substantial say in how Australia is governed, unfortunately since colonization this has not been the case. When the Europeans colonised they took away everything from the original founders of Australian land, the Aboriginals. These people had their own terrain, their original homes taken away from them. The settlers took charge of land that had been founded and owned and they had no right to take possession and set rules that the Aborigines could not comprehend. As Hollingsworth states, "*Governments passed laws that took away the rights of Aboriginal people. The government had complete control over them.*" (Hollingsworth, 2003). Europeans arrived into the lives of these Aboriginals and took absolute control over their lives, they had no right to step into their lives and take charge when they were not the original inhabitants. If a person owns a house how can it be possible for another to step in and take complete control of it, as it is something that isn't originally theirs? It's not correct nor morally right.

Fairness, justice, moral values.

The Australian Defence Force should not be intervening without adequate collaboration with Indigenous elders. This intervention program will create new and different rules for the Aboriginal and non-aboriginal people and also take the Indigenous peoples control away from who enters their land. (Fran Baum: August 7 2007). As original owners of the land, the elders should have adequate control therefore they should be the higher authority, they should be the point of call. However this is not happening, as the report of the Northern Territory Board states, "*We have been conscious throughout our enquiries of the need for that consultation and for Aboriginal people to be involved*" (Report of the Northern Territory Board). This report was offered to the Chief Minister and clearly states that in order to show that the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory have the right to have control of their lives. As Baum states "*Their report called not for the declaration of war, with its echoes of domination and crisis, but for a thoughtful consultative process that stands some chance of achieving meaningful change*" (Fran Baum: August 7, 2007). The Northern territory did not ask or recommend soldier assistance but help so that their community could change.

There are many cases in history where soldiers are given orders however whether or not they choose to follow those orders in the end each and every one is responsible for their actions. Just because the soldiers are following their orders, does not justify whether the actions are moral. The events of the My Lai Massacre and the Holocaust are examples: The My Lai Massacre where a whole Vietnamese village was massacred in less than four hours and the Holocaust being the genocide of approximately six million Jews during the World War two. These are both examples of soldiers taking on immoral and unjust actions after been given orders.

Paternalism

Paternalist values of the 50s can be said to be mirroring the events in the Northern Territory. New rules have been set for the Northern Territory community which takes away their power to control their own community, this can be said to resemble what happened to the Aboriginals during the Policy of protection. Throughout the Policy of Protection the Aboriginals their rights and their lives were controlled by the government. *“The administrator potentially held absolute power on the reserve and had the right to decide where Aboriginal people worked. The administrator also had control of their money, even the power to decide who was allowed to marry.”* (H.Mackay, Longman History 10). Although some circumstances in the NTER are altered having complete control is not any different to what happened in the 50’s during the Policy of Protection.

Equality

The wishes of the Northern Territory communities are not being listened to. The United Nations states, *“Affirming that indigenous peoples are equal to all other peoples”*. (United Nations, 2007). This clearly states that the Aboriginal people are equal and share the rights to others so therefore why are the Northern Territory community experiencing such victimisation by the government? In the Oxfam report it clearly makes recommendations, to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Increase health practitioners, improve healthcare services and programs, more maternal and child health care, greater funding and support for good health and to set national target towards achieving equality. None of these recommend or even suggest soldier assistance; however the government has obviously ignored these recommendations to a more hands on approach. Why are the Northern Territories recommendations and requests being ignored?

If help is requested then the aid of the ADF should definitely take place, the requests, needs and wants of the Northern Territory community should definitely be noted and are the most important. Before intervening and taking part the thoughts of the people need to be listened to. In order for peace a conflicted community needs the aid of higher authority however this should only take place if the community is informed and there is sufficient collaboration with the elders of the community. A good citizen is one who has good morals and values; the ADF definitely defines a good citizen. (Figure 2)

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1. Northern Territory child with soldier.
(ABC News, Income Management [online])



2. Major General Dave Chambers speaking with
Valarie and granddaughter. (Australian
Government, Operational Update [online])

Figures:

1. ABC News, Income Management (online). Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/10/06/2382729.htm> [October 29, 2008]
2. Australian Government, Operation Update (online). Available at http://www.facs.gov.au/nter/operation_update.htm. [October 29, 2008]

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