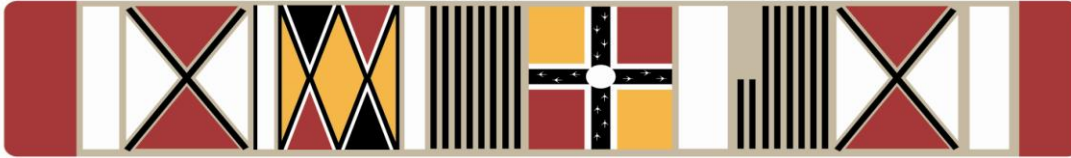


Yolŋu Makarr Dhuni

Miwatj, Laynha, Raminy, Marthakal, Garriny, Gumurr-Rawarrag, Gattjirrik and Midiyirrk



16/05/13

Chief Minister Adam Giles
GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801

Yolŋu Makarr Dhuni
C/o PMB 239
Winnellie NT 0822

Dear Honourable Chief Minister of the Northern Territory Adam Giles,

As Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory, we vehemently oppose your proposed policy to take away our children and give them up for adoption.

The majority of our people live in Third World conditions, with poverty, unemployment and disadvantage a part of everyday life. The struggle of families to raise their children properly comes from this lack of stability, not from a lack of responsibility. Like everyone else in the world, we love our children deeply and want the best for them. We need support to do this. Not for our children to be taken away from us.

Since the Intervention started in 2007, we've seen family support services almost disappear, whilst more and more of our children are being taken away by child protection services.

Mr Giles, you claim that only one child has been taken away and given up for adoption in the last 10 years. But the fact is, about 60 children are being taken away every month in the NT by child protection services. Children are being taken away from us at numbers not seen since the Stolen Generations.

Our families already live in fear. If our babies do not put enough weight, child protection officers come in by force to take them away. We already live under such heavy control, with no respect or support given to us. This law will paralyse our people.

Help us to give our children the standard of life they deserve, instead of destroying our families.

Little Children Are Sacred. In our culture, "wälk", the womb of the mother, is of utmost sacredness to us - the unbreakable bond between a mother and child. A connection that you cannot separate. By doing this, you are taking away the God-given right for a child to be raised by her mother. For traditional people, this is an abhorrence.

A Yolŋu child has a spirituality, his own 'skin', his culture, language, and place in his community. He belongs to that country and its people. You are committing a deep wrong by taking that away from him.

This is why so many of the Stolen Generation have suffered so much. The deep psychological trauma from being taken away has led so many of them to substance abuse, contact with the criminal courts and family breakdown. And the trauma is then passed onto their children.

In the case of the Stolen Generations, as you do today, the policy of forced removal of children was justified as *"in the best interest of the children"*. 40 years after it ended, the nation acknowledged the deep wrong of such a policy and began a long-awaited healing process with our people. What you now propose to do is to tear open the bandages and cut us again.

The dysfunction in our communities is caused by decades of neglect, and is now further exacerbated by the disempowering policies of the Federal and NT Governments. As people with dignity, we also want to improve the lives of our people, especially the children who represent our future. But we need your help to do this, not your punishment and more pain for our people.

I ask you, Mr Giles and the Government that you represent, is the only solution to condemn parents and take away their rights as a human being to raise their own children?

Or is there another way that can support parents to organize their family affairs in a way that is culturally appropriate and that gives them the capacity for control and discipline, imbued with love and care?

All children have the right to remain in their communities and to enjoy their own cultures. This is a requirement under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We need more family support programmes in every community run by Aboriginal people. When there are problems, we need ways to bring together those in the community who can offer support through family group conferencing. Together we can find better ways to keep our children safe.

In this regard, Yolŋu Makarr Dhuni supports kinship care placements and direct negotiation and resolution with the parents, extended family (ŋändi-mothers and märi-grandmothers) and clan leaders of those children reported or found to be at risk. We have our own protective measures in our society and they should be used.

Let us work together to address the underlying causes of our situation, and build a safe and healthy future that empowers and uplifts our people, for generations to come.

Yours respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Djiniyini Gondarra". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra OAM
Yolŋu Makarr Dhuni Djawarrkmirr- Spokesperson