

## **ARCHBISHOP TUTU'S PRAYER FOR THE RIGHTS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES**

On World Peace Day 2014, I pray for the rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia to determine their own destiny.

It is a severe indictment on Australia that many of its indigenous people still feel that their culture and dignity are being eroded, and that they continue to be treated as second class citizens – 42 years after the country signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Aboriginal elders say that although the Aboriginal Land Rights Act of 1976 transferred control of much of the Northern Territory to Aboriginal peoples, the people never had the opportunity to draw true advantage from the land. They were ill prepared to deal with complex Western bureaucracies, and their efforts have been undermined by under-development and neglect.

The imposition of legislation generally known as the Northern Territory Intervention, in 2007, virtually stripped them of their voice.

Community councils have been closed down and management of many aspects of the peoples' lives has been transferred to non-indigenous institutions. The exclusion of local Aboriginal perspectives from decision-making is directly eroding customs, laws, languages and land-use aspirations. Nearly 50% of the youth in detention in Australia are Aboriginal, although the Aboriginal population constitutes just 3% of the Australian population.

There are no first-class and second-class citizens on earth, just citizens; sisters and brothers of one family, the human family, God's family. Our diversity is a Gift from God. It strengthens and enriches us.

All people, regardless of their looks, cultures and beliefs – including the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia – are equally entitled to dignity, to justice, and to the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

I support those who have called for a Truth and Justice Commission for Aboriginal Peoples to lay bare the horrors of the past and, finally, commence a national healing process for all Australians.

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