

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Guyula to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs:

Indigenous Rights - UN Rapporteur on Rights of Indigenous Peoples

1. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been in Darwin talking with Aboriginal peak bodies. How is the Northern Territory Government policy consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Northern Territory?
2. Particularly, I am interested in the Northern Territory Government position on Indigenous language rights, which includes the right to receive education in Indigenous languages, and our right to participate in the enforcement of justice in our regions.

Answer:

1. The NT Government policy is consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Most of the rights outlined in the Declaration are already recognised and protected in Australia through our own domestic laws or our support for other international conventions and treaties.

One of the rights stated in the declaration is, 'Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision making institutions'.

The NT Government, in cooperation with Aboriginal Territorians is embarking on the most significant empowering of Indigenous people since Self Government. A 10 year plan to drive Local Decision Making (LDM) for Aboriginal Territorians through government partnering with Aboriginal representative organisations and Aboriginal people is being developed. LDM will be progressed for housing, local government, education and training, health, looking after children and law and justice.

Building, supporting and investing in strong Aboriginal capability will be important to ensure local people drive local solutions and Aboriginal organisations are supported.

2. Indigenous Language Rights

The Department of Education supports nine remote schools to implement various models of bilingual teaching and learning programs.

Bilingual programs use two languages in a systemic formal manner for teaching – the language the students speak as their first language and English.

The nine NT Government schools that deliver bilingual programs are detailed below:

Language maintenance bilingual / biliteracy programs are run at:

- Yirrkala School.
- Shepherdson College.
- Milingimbi School.
- Areyonga School.
- Willowra School.
- Yuendumu School.

Ability to Participate in Justice Decisions

The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice has commenced work to develop an Aboriginal Justice Agreement (which may include separate locally based agreements) to improve the experience of Aboriginal Territorians in the justice system, and support them to actively participate in decisions that impact upon them.

A key principle underpinning the Aboriginal Justice Agreement is to deliver on the government's commitment to reassert local control and increase the role for traditional leadership in our justice system.

Pilot Diversionary Programs

As part of the process to assist communities with the key aims of the Agreement, NT Government is consulting with Aboriginal communities who may want to establish a new pilot program for community offenders as an alternative option to imprisonment or for people who are identified at risk of offending.

These programs will eventually form part of the deliverables under the proposed new Aboriginal Justice Agreement.