



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

Ms Clare Schulz and Ms Bronwyn Crowe
Australian Student Christian Movement
157A Bishopsgate Street
CARLISLE WA 6101

17 SEP 2007

Dear Ms Schulz and Ms Crowe

Thank you for your letter of 13 July 2007 to the Prime Minister regarding the protection of indigenous children in the Northern Territory from sexual abuse. The Prime Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf. I apologise for the delay in responding.

While your concerns in relation to the government's response to the national emergency in the Northern Territory have been noted, it should be recognised that sexual abuse is a crime and the onus is on authorities to act to enforce the law and to afford children appropriate protection. The 'Little Children are Sacred' report reveals extreme levels of abuse in remote Northern Territory aboriginal communities indicating that the Northern Territory Government has failed these children.

The Constitution allows the Commonwealth Government to intervene in the Northern Territory. It is for this reason that the government has announced a package of broad ranging measures to stabilise and protect communities in the Northern Territory. The government is of the view that the old approach towards indigenous affairs has not worked and that the safety of indigenous children must be an absolute priority.

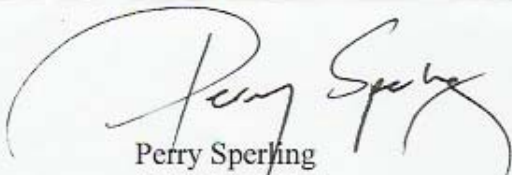
With regard to your comments about the government's plan to link welfare payments to school attendance, the government believes that every Australian child has the right to receive an education and fulfill their potential. This is a fundamental responsibility of parents and action must be taken where parents fail to meet that responsibility to their children. Successive governments have tried other measures to increase school attendance. However, these have had only limited success. There is a strong relationship between school achievement and the number of people who become long-term unemployed and welfare dependent. It is therefore vital that the educational outcomes of children are improved to reduce intergenerational welfare dependency.

The government's immediate priority in the Northern Territory, however, is to ensure that children are protected and can sleep at night without fear of violence or abuse. Engagement is occurring at the local community level as the assistance occurs, which is the most appropriate place to discuss the government's objectives and to encourage local cooperation.

Over the longer term, the government will continue to work with the Northern Territory Government and indigenous communities to implement a package of reforms that ensures the needs of indigenous people in these communities are met. I assure you that the government is committed to achieving a long term solution to the problem of child abuse in Aboriginal communities so that indigenous children and their families can have a better future.

Thank you again for bringing your views to the Prime Minister's attention.

Yours sincerely



Perry Sperling
Senior Adviser