

JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN IN REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

This assignment was originally aimed to show if there is justice for children in remote indigenous communities. While researching this topic the research led to the underlying causes of the current situation of Aboriginal people in Australia and what experts and the Australian Government has done and is doing about it.

As I have not had any knowledge about these problems when I started my research this assignment only reflects what is being said in my sources, which are mainly newspaper articles and the "Little Children Are Sacred" report by the NT Government.

I have not spoken to anybody involved in this situation and as a journalist at a newspaper writes about a topic like this, he automatically includes a personal opinion. This means that all articles this assignment bases on are subjective and influence the reader. This has to be kept in mind when reading this assignment.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ASSIGNMENT 2 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

JUSTICE FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

YEAR 11 LIVING JUSTLY

STUDENT:

Lars Ippich

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very low
Detailed knowledge of this social justice topic	√				
Depth of thought and understanding	√				
Application of religion and compassion.	√				
Work habits in class.	√				

GRADE: A+

PART 1: HOW BAD IS THE PROBLEM?

THERE ARE FOUR SUPERFICIAL PROBLEMS: SEXUAL ABUSE, POOR HEALTH, ALCOHOL ABUSE AND DRUG ABUSE.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is a topic most people just do not speak about. Most victims never report to anybody after having been forced into an undesired sexual act by another person, resulting in a large dark figure.

A letter from a 13-year-old girl, written on behalf of her grandfather, a Warlpiri man from the Northern Territories says that "[they] never heard of all this rape [...] here. That stuff happens mostly in the town areas."^[1] This quote leads to the view that the problem with sexual abuse is mainly a problem in town areas, rather than in rural areas.

But on the other hand, "Winkie Ingomar, 52, has pleaded guilty to five counts of unlawful sexual intercourse with the three girls, who were 13 and 14 when the abuse occurred at Yalata, 800km northwest of Adelaide."^[2] The quoted article states that Yalata is a 300-member community and this reveals that it is quite difficult to determine where sexual abuse is more or less likely to take place referring to the population.

The events had a huge impact on the girls' personality: "All girls said they feared future relationships with men. One of their mothers said she had become ill after learning of the abuse, turning to alcohol."^[2]

"[*The Little Children Are Sacred* report] reveals that in one community girls aged between 12 and 15 were engaged in a 'rampant informal sex trade' with non-Aboriginal workers from an unnamed mining company. The girls, provided with alcohol, cash and other goods in exchange for sex, would actively approach mining workers. Police told the inquiry they were aware of the 'sex trade' but there was little they could do because of a 'culture of silence'. The inquiry was told that a non-Aboriginal man took young Aboriginal girls from a remote community to Darwin where he traded sex with them for drugs."^[3]

Manyi Rioli, president of the Pirlangimpi community of about 300 people on Melville Island, wrote to Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough that "there had only been two cases of abuse in the community in the past 18 years – both of them involving white outsiders who had exposed themselves to local children and were removed."^[4]

Sexual abuse does not only occur in form of undesired sexual acts, but also in form of being exposed to adults having sex and to pornography. This results in abnormal behaviour: "In one community children as young as six were regularly seen acting out sexual behaviour in groups. One child was only three."^[3]

The large number of unreported cases is what the Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation's chief executive, Jodie Bell, means when she said: "We would be naive to think that sexual abuse doesn't happen in our community, because it happens in every community."^[5]

"Overall, the constant message passed to the inquiry was that as traditional Aboriginal and missionary-imposed norms regarding sex broke down, they were being replaced with rampant promiscuity among teenagers,' the inquiry said. 'Teenagers no longer saw themselves as bound by the old ways and many viewed the modern world as lawless. [...] Many of the victims had now become the perpetrators."^[3]

Poor health

"The *Little Children are Sacred* report notes that 99% of NT Aboriginal communities have no substance abuse service and 99% have no dental service. Only 54% have government-funded primary care services and 47% have an Aboriginal primary health care service centre located more than 50km away."^[6]

However, this problem is not new. In June 2005 the Commonwealth Government "announced a new Medicare-funded annual Indigenous health check for children from birth to 14 years of age"^[7]. This clearly shows that the poor health of children in remote indigenous communities is a well-known problem.

Another important fact to note is that sexual abuse is linked to poor health. This connection does not only refer to psychological problems as mentioned before, but also to medical ones: In February 2007 a 13-year-old girl has been found as "22 weeks pregnant and infected with chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhoea."^[8]

"An association has been found between child sexual abuse and the development of mental health problems in later life. These may include: eating disorders, anxiety, depression, withdrawn behaviour, self-harm and suicide,

low self esteem, psycho-physiological disorders, higher rates of dissociation and high rates of substance abuse."^[9]

Drug and alcohol abuse

"The Inquiry found that cannabis has been a significant issue identified at nearly every community meeting it has held. Participants in these meetings identified that cannabis is present in their community and they believe it is having negative effects on community and family life and, in particular, consequential effects on the care and protection of children."^[10]

They found out that drug abuse has a huge impact on family life and on the whole community: "The price paid for cannabis means there is a reduced amount of money available to purchase food and other necessities, it causes fighting when a person humbugs family members for money to buy cannabis, there is fighting when people become agitated because they cannot get cannabis, it is often used in conjunction with other substances like alcohol, many young people are using cannabis, it may lead to suppliers introducing more harmful drugs into the community, a person's mental health is affected as a result of chronic smoking of cannabis, there are not enough services to prevent cannabis use or get people off using cannabis, children and young people are unable to go to school and learn, non-users encourage some young people to use cannabis because it keeps them quiet and the community calmer, children not fed, supervised or cared for as their, parents are too busy smoking, affected by smoking or trying to find/buy cannabis, cannabis users are negative role models for children who are observing their behaviours, cannabis is used to attract young girls, children/young people will trade sex for cannabis, cannabis use removes sexual inhibitions that may constrain inappropriate sexual behaviours."^[10]

Alcohol is a drug as well, but the consumption of alcohol has been accepted by the society even more than smoking cigarettes. Drinking alcohol is considered to be normal behaviour and usually it is the people who do not drink any alcohol who stand out. But the addiction to alcohol can easily lead into serious problems.

The amount of alcohol being consumed more than marginal: "About 200,000 Territorians bought more than 3 million litres from 570 licensed premises in the year 2005-06, [...]. Half of it was sold through takeaway stores [...]. Alice Springs alone has 13 takeaway liquor outlets for a population of about 30,000."^[11]

Only "one Alice Springs outlet is testing an ID system that records the details of all buyers and ensures they do not buy alcohol more than once per day."^[11]

It is not only the people selling the alcohol making money, but also the taxi drivers when offering their cars to Aboriginal people because of the law stating that it is necessary to be in a car to buy alcohol from a take-away store: "Commercial Passenger Vehicle Board member Leigh Shacklady made a formal complaint yesterday against one driver, alleging that he had refused to allow an Aboriginal man to buy a full carton of beer from his taxi because the man had only \$50. He said the driver ordered the bottle-shop attendant to hand over half a carton, then pocketed the change, about \$25, for a fare that should have been \$10."^[12]

These taxi drivers make good money because of the alcoholism of Aboriginal people and therefore belong to the group of people not wanting to cure the alcohol addictions.

Some Aboriginal people claim that "Most drinking here is done by whitefellas who have drinking permit and we know they touch our kids but they all stick up against us when we talk. How can we talk when they are our boss for work?"^[1]

In some Aboriginal communities the alcohol abuse is too massive to escape from it – the babies just get born with it: "[Fitzroy Crossing] has its share of babies born with foetal alcohol addiction."^[5]

The problems seem to be far away in the Northern Territory, but "here in Shepparton, the food bowl of Australia, two-thirds of our people will die by the time they reach their 50s. Unemployment among the town's Aborigines sits at nearly 80 per cent. Government statistics hide this disaster behind a wall of manipulated data, with Aborigines added to job totals no matter how brief or destructive their employment."^[13]

PART 2: HOW HAS IT COME TO THIS?

Most of these issues came out after the "Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007" by Rex Wild and Pat Anderson had been published. In the media this report is usually referred to as the "Little Children Are Sacred" report.

Both the report itself and the following media attention revealed the bad situation of children in remote indigenous communities to a broader audience. But investigation the children's situation also brought up some of the underlying causes: "The report mentioned cases of alleged sexual abuse of infants as young as six months. This abuse is part of a much broader problem of widespread poverty, poor health, high unemployment and imprisonment rates, and inadequate housing and education. A Canadian study of 100 countries found the quality-of-life of Australia's indigenous population was the second worst in the world. At 59.6 years, the life expectancy of Australia's Aboriginal population is more than 10 years less than indigenous Canadians (72.9 years) and New Zealand's Maoris (72.1). According to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Aboriginal babies die at almost three times the rate of non-indigenous children."^[14]

"For many of these kids, it's safer down the street than it is at home," Fitzroy Crossing Senior Sergeant Rod Boehm said about the current situation in his community.^[15]

There are different things being blamed for the current situation, but most of the people blame alcohol abuse for the other problems in their communities:

A study of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research revealed "that more than a third of indigenous assault victims had financial problems and those charged with a criminal offence as a child were almost twice as likely to be assaulted as those who were not."^[15]

The *Little Children Are Sacred* report says as well: "Excessive consumption of alcohol is variously described as the cause or result of poverty, unemployment, lack of education, boredom and overcrowded and inadequate housing. The use of other drugs and petrol sniffing can be added to these. Together, they lead to excessive violence. In the worst case scenario it leads to sexual abuse of children."^[16]

There is another problem: A never-ending loop over the generations. "In her unpublished PhD thesis, Caroline Atkinson-Ryan interviewed 58 Aboriginal prisoners from around Australia (including in the Northern Territory), who had been convicted of sexual and/or physical assaults. She found that 22 of the 58 prisoners indicated during interviews that they had themselves experienced rape or sexual abuse. She classified 19 of the 22 as suffering from posttraumatic stress symptoms. Some of their experiences and insights make harrowing reading:

'And you know like; I suppose the biggest part in my life was the sexual abuse. You know that happened from not long after the old man grabbed me, a friend of the family, and I put up with it till the age of 14, when I said no enough's enough. It started about four or five years old. Now, like with my crime now, [rape] like when I see these programs mob and they say "hang on, you talk about empathy. Now let's put on your shoes, putting yourself in the shoes of the victim" and I said hang on, woo, pull up, I was a victim. So I've seen both sides of the fence and I can comment to you as a victim and as a perpetrator of the crime."^[17]

Gregory Phillips, a medical anthropologist specialising in healing, posttraumatic stress syndromes and addictions in indigenous communities blames the history for the current Aboriginal behaviour: "It is, in fact, a learned behaviour. Where did Aborigines learn it? It is partly a hangover of the missionary days only 20 and 30 years ago, where sexual violence was routinely perpetrated on Aborigines by police, pastoralists and missionaries, and where the church often forced people to marry against their social and cultural clan systems. This is not an excuse for abuse today, but it is part of the reason people are behaving this way now."^[18]

The Warlpiri man from the Northern Territories mentioned before says: "If we have problem we always sort it out ourself. Spears stop even the worst of them. If bad stuff happens, they wait till night. Police don't patrol at night and our night patrol can't get money. Me and my family feel safer (with) night patrol than police."^[1]

Other Aboriginal people claim the opposite: "Our law is not working properly," Keith Peters, pastor and Yalata elder said. "The traditional law is slowly fading away because a lot of our Aboriginal people are getting invogled with alcohol and drugs. When people do wrong things, they should be brought to trial. [...] If [Winkie Ingomar] had done this [rape] in the earlier years (under tribal law) ... he would have been killed."^[2]

"One community claimed that it took seven years before a known child-sex offender was arrested. 'Because of the perception that he got away with it because he was white, people were ... not motivated to report it,' the inquiry said."^[3]

But bringing people to trial is a problem, the Warlpiri man says: "Police treats us like dogs sometimes. [...] If we report any problems here, no one listens. They call us troublemakers or radicals."^[1]

And there is not always police available: "The [Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal] corporation's chief executive, Jodie Bell, wants a 24-hour police station [in Fitzroy Crossing]. She said the hospital was understaffed, there were teacher shortages and the town had not had a dentist for 2½ years. [...] Senior Sergeant Rod Boehm said [...] a visit from Derby mental health counsellors every few weeks was insufficient and he would like a permanent mental health service."^[5]

Another thing leaving to alcohol abuse in order to try to just forget about things is the resignation a lot of Aboriginal people have to deal with: "I want my kids to learn but why should our kids get education? There are no jobs here anyway, all the big jobs are taken by whitefellas. They won't give us a go because they want the money. We don't have a say in our own programs and the salary money goes to their mates they bring up. We don't even know some of these people who work here. [...] I can't speak good English but I want a say in things."^[1]

It is believed that the alcohol abuse problem could be solved by law and that regulations could control the alcohol: "Higher taxes on strong alcohol such as cask wine would lower rates of violent assaults in indigenous communities, according to a study of alcohol abuse. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research report shows a quarter of the Aboriginal population was assaulted in a 12-month period and alcohol was mainly to blame. The study says 42 per cent of indigenous assault victims were heavy alcohol abusers, compared with 23 per cent of indigenous victims who drank but not heavily."^[15]

"According to Dr Weatherburn's analysis, indigenous men and women had equal chances of becoming victims of violence, and whether they were living in cities or remote communities made no difference. While high-risk alcohol consumption was identified as the strongest precursor to violence, other significant factors included substance abuse, a disability, and living with a person who had been charged with an offence. [...] 'But alcohol emerges as the dominant factor,' Dr Weatherburn said. 'So the take-home message for policy-makers is, if you want to start in a particular place, you have to start with alcohol abuse.' [...] 'Alcohol has become the means by which people can't get out of their current predicament. The violence continues, the kids suffer, they grow up and drink."^[19]

Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute and indigenous leader, blames events in the past for what is happening in the present: "Since the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal people have believed their right earned was the right to drink ... The government is paying these people to sit around the canteen to drink and destroy the prospects of their children – destroy society. The madness of that system has to stop.", Mr Pearson wrote in "Our Right to Take Responsibility" in 1999.^[20]

He also said on TV: "The collapse of responsibility that we see, the wasteland of responsibility of indigenous Australia, is the consequence of government and bureaucracies and welfare organisations, including NGOs, who have intervened in Aboriginal Affairs and said, 'Listen you don't have to take responsibility, you have a whole suite of rights, including the right to welfare, the right to drink, the right to party all night, the right to the trappings of office without being accountable for any return on you role.'^[21]

However, the factors contributing to the incidence of child abuse and neglect were already known in the past. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare noted in 2000: "Poverty, poor socio-economic status, differences in child rearing practices, and inter-generational effects of previous separations are all considered significant factors in the national over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect and in placement in out-of-home care."^[22]

"In discussion family type the AIHW (1999) note the over representation of children from sole parent families in substantiations, (both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non Indigenous), and that the likely reasons for this are that these families are more likely to: Have low incomes and be financially stressed, live in poor quality housing, and suffer from social isolation."^[23]

The overall situation has been summarized quite well by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care in their briefing paper back in December 2002:

"In summary the key factors which are commonly associated with child abuse and neglect include: Poverty, unemployment, family stress/violence/breakdown, homelessness and inadequate housing, substance and alcohol abuse, poor health, low educational attainment, sole parents families or families with multiple problems and complex needs, families suffering from loss of culture or the effects of dispossession and child removal in previous generations."

PART 3: WHAT ARE THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS TO FIX THE SITUATION?

The measures as announced by the Federal Government to tackle child abuse in Northern Territory indigenous communities are as following:

- "Six-month ban on alcohol on NT Aboriginal land.
- Ban on X-rated pornography and audits of computers to identify illegal material.
- Welfare reform to quarantine 50 per cent of payments to ensure they are spent on necessities such as food.
- Enforcing school attendance by linking it to income support and family assistance payments.
- Compulsory health checks for all Aboriginal children.
- Increasing police numbers.
- Clean-up and repair of communities by work-for-the-dole participants.
- Scrapping the permit system for common areas, road corridors and airstripes on Aboriginal land.
- Response to be overseen by a taskforce led by magistrate Sue Gordon, chairwoman of the National Indigenous Council.
- Referral to the Australian Crime Commission to identify perpetrators of sexual abuse of indigenous children in other areas of Australia.
- Five-year leases of townships by the Federal Government"^[24], including "new government managers in every community"
- School meals for children at parent's cost"^[25]

The Age explains some of the measures: "Under the plan, the Federal Government will take control of the leases of 60 Aboriginal communities for the next five years. Police and army troops have been sent into communities to restore law and order. Widespread alcohol and pornography bans have been mooted. Volunteer doctors will provide medical examinations for children under 16. Authorities have also changed welfare payment systems; Aboriginal parents will have half their allowance quarantined to pay for food and other living essentials, and welfare payments will be linked to children's school attendance. The Government is considering plans to introduce a food-stamp system in the form of Eftpos cards, for indigenous and non-indigenous families with children whose wellbeing is in doubt."^[26] – "Welfare recipients will be forced to help clean up homes and streets to ensure safe and hygienic living conditions, with managers able to inspect houses."^[27]

The government is also already trying to control how much alcohol is being consumed and to enforce the rule saying that it is not allowed to consume alcohol in public within one mile around a proposed establishment: "The federal Government is proposing that all Territorians buying three cartons or more of full-strength beer – or the equivalent amount of other alcohol – must show ID and declare the address at which it will be consumed."^[19]

PART 4: FORS AND AGAINSTS THESE PROPOSALS

"The intervention plans have caused a furious public debate. Some critics have described the plans as racist, paternalistic and draconian. According to opinion polls there's a strong perception the Government's intervention is an election-year stunt. John Howard has been in power for 11 years and could have acted sooner. But the Government has played down the timing and says it should be applauded for acting swiftly while the state and territory governments continued to ignore the problems. There is anger from opponents that Aboriginal leaders and state and territory governments were not consulted during the policy's development. There have been media reports that a small number of women, fearing another 'stolen generation' have taken their children into the bush to hide. Some legal experts and indigenous leaders claim the plan is a grab for Aboriginal land. Government land control could benefit mining companies wanting to extend operations into traditional lands. The Government denies this."^[27]

However, *The Age* also says that some Aboriginal leaders, such as Noel Pearson, are welcoming the action because Aboriginal issues are seldom at the top of the national agenda. This is not a big surprise for those who were listening to him years ago: "The finding that alcohol consumption is a key contributor to abuse and dysfunction in Aboriginal communities is hardly an earth-shattering revelation. It is precisely what Aboriginal lawyer Noel Pearson has been saying for nearly a decade – and why he is so determined to address the problems facing his people."^[20]

The *National Indigenous Times* editorial of 28.06.07 supports Mr Pearson: "The *Little Children Are Sacred* report makes it clear the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory is common, widespread, and grossly under-reported, and that there is nothing new or extraordinary in these allegations. Aboriginal people have been crying for help for decades. What is new is the PM's interest, months out from a federal election. Shame, Mr Howard, shame!"

Jacqui O'Connell, a reader of *The Age*, accedes: "Yet again in an election year he has reached into the sack and pulled out an issue guaranteed to divide, inflame and divert attention from other issues where his Government has systematically failed. [...] But what Howard is doing, and he does this so cleverly, is to turn an ongoing issue into one of immediate importance right before an election so we, the thinking and voting public, shelve all other issues."^[28]

There are also people welcoming the proposals: Laura Packham from Pascoe Vale South wrote to *The Age*: "My entire life has been overlooked by the Howard Government, but particularly the 12 years I lived in Alice Springs. [...] Who cares if this is an election poly; it's on the agenda and we should no longer allow the suffering of Aboriginal people, which is killing their culture."^[29]

Paul Ryan from Warragul congratulates Mr Howard "for his courage and candour" and is happy that "someone has the political will to tackle this rampant degradation of children."^[30]

Other readers see the issue more critically: Jenny O'Connor wrote to *The Age* the Government should "send in the cops" and called it "fabulous", but also asked them to send in the "doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, drug and alcohol counsellors, sexual assault advocates and mental health workers also desperately required."

The Age notes that the words "children" or "child" do not appear in the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill*: "There is no mention of children in the main bill, which supposedly addresses the emergency of child abuse. [...] But it has everything to do with a government seeking re-election by blowing the dog whistle of racism in the guise of caring for indigenous children."^[31]

From the governments point of view this was the time to act: "Mr Howard said the report [...] had been in the hands of the NT Government for weeks. 'We're doing this because we do not think the Territory has responded to the crisis affecting the children in the Territory and we believe that our responsibility to those children overrides any sensitivities of Commonwealth-Territory relations,' he said."^[32]

On the other hand "NT Chief Minister Clare Martin said she was happy to work with the Commonwealth, but rejected [these] claims her Government had been slow to act on the abuse report."^[32]

This might not be the full truth, because Muriel Bamblett, chairwomen of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, claims that: "After all, Aboriginal and Islander leaders [...] have been calling for action for decades. In fact, four years ago the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care produced a report on neglect and child abuse in the Northern Territory called *State of Denial* that called for a comprehensive framework and service response for Aboriginal child protection and family services. Unfortunately, both the territory and the federal governments failed to respond."^[33]

She is also complaining that the Prime Minister: "says the 'old ways' have failed and the time for talk is over." She would like to believe him, but says his own 'old way' of dealing with Aboriginal people was to disregard their voices: "If we had been consulted, we would have given the Federal Government our professional advice that behaviour changes only when people are empowered and given positive encouragement. This punitive approach will have only a short-term impact – it doesn't address the underlying issues."

Rod Hagen shares this opinion: "Too many people see the answer simply in terms of treating the symptoms – in things such as policing and control – rather than the underlying causes." [34]

Also Jon Altman, director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University, said the response was heavy-handed and therefore supports Ms Bamblett: "What you have seen from (Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough) and the Prime Minister is a total unwillingness to deal with underlying issues, which is the neglect and marginalisation of Aboriginal communities,' he said. 'We are seeing a knee-jerk reaction.'" [32]

Even "one of the report's co-chairs, Rex Wild, QC, said he had not expected such a strong reaction from the Commonwealth, which had failed to consult him before announcing its sweeping reforms." [32]

"Aboriginal activist Michael Mansell described Mr Howard's announcement as the equivalent of his boat people and immigration stance leading up to previous federal elections. 'Mr Howard again plays the race card,' he said." [32]

There are also some people who make connections to other events going on in the world: "Protest organiser Sara Maynard said local Aboriginal people, reinforced by some from interstate, felt it was time that Mr Howard ran into direct opposition to his policy for NT indigenous communities. 'Other people might put up with it, but we definitely don't down here,' Ms Maynard said. 'The images we have seen on TV are just like the war in Iraq. Foreign people walking on your land. Why isn't he knocking down white communities' doors?'" [35]

Probably because they do not have what Mr Howard wants according to what Gregory Phillips says: "What Howard really wants is to destabilise Aboriginal communal rights to land, and to get easy access to the NT's uranium." [36]

Sonia Smallacombe from New York steps further when she wrote to *The Age* and said: "The Government has clearly not thought through the issues and simply exchanged the 'war on terrorism' for the 'war on indigenous people'."

Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of *The Age*, says that some of the people making decisions may be misled by their own well-being environment: "There is within every [aboriginal] community good people, and it's an absolutely shameful thing those good people are misled by people whose children sleep safely at night. 'That's the horrendous thing here. That are people who are naysaying any kind of intervention are people whose children, like my own, sleep safe at night.'" [37]

Besides these criticism regarding the procedure itself, there is also criticism against the measures themselves: "'Forcing children to submit to an intrusive examination without good evidence or parental consent is akin to abuse', indigenous associate professor of child and adolescent psychiatry Helen Milroy warned." [33]

This also would not work, Ruth Borenstein, a child psychiatrist from East Hwathorn says: "[A physical examination] is a complex, time-consuming process, which needs to be culturally and developmentally sensitive to the child. This is not a simple 'health check'. We do not have adequate resources in the city with a shortage of qualified clinicians, let alone for remote indigenous communities."

"Tourist buses used to drive in to Amoonguna unfettered," Rod Hagen, a Victorian anthropologist, reports and then warns: "White men looking for sexual services were not uncommon visitors to the community. [...] Has the Government really thought through the consequences of removing community control over access?" [34]

Long-time NSW campaigner Judy Atkinson called the alcohol restrictions a "lopsided response" and said Mr Howard had missed the point, because the alcohol ban was only directed at Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory: "Many of these areas are already dry. Many of the women have been saying they don't want alcohol sold close to those communities. [...] People who can't get grog at the border of the lands will go into the towns." Ms Atkinson, Professor of Southern Cross University's Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples also said: "He (the Prime Minister) is not saying there should be a blanked ban on the sale of alcohol from Woolworths in Alice Springs." [38]

She is being supported by Don Weatherburn, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research director: "[...] You could fix unemployment, you could fix poverty in Aboriginal communities and you would still have a problem with alcohol. [...] Alcohol is the cause of violent assaults by a huge margin." [15]

The Age called the proposal "micro-management" and said that Australia was "in a crises that won't be resolved in the months before a federal election, not at the political level anyway." [39]

And Mark Freeman from Macleod suggests to *The Herald Sun*: "How about we all give up the grog for six months? If it's good enough for outback Aborigines, it's good enough for all of us. Imagine that – a dry election campaign."

Gregory Phillips says that it is possible to solve the problem in the community itself and that: "[...] Native Canadian communities in crises with sexual abuse have turned the issue around in 10 years by community-led action, by government being prepared to listen to and trust local community leaders, and by supporting communities themselves to make the abuse of alcohol a socially unacceptable behaviour."

This will not work with the current government, he says: "This is a government too hungry for power and control, and prepared to ignore evidence to use it. [...] Howard's central message in Aboriginal affairs since the time of the Hindmarsh Island affair is that all Aborigines and their culture and spiritually are false. [...] He uses issues such as sexual abuse as reasons apparently Aborigines can't manage their own affairs."^[36]

That is why Graham Wills-Johnson from Moonee Ponds blames the bureaucrats, not the Aborigines: "I have recently worked as a doctor in a remote central Australian community. It was a peaceful place, as attested by the proximity of the nearest police station which was more than 200 kilometres away. Alcohol had been banned by the elders, a largely respected ruling. Child sex abuse was certainly not a major problem. The most pressing issue in this community is undoubtedly health, particularly child health."

And Anne Flanagan from Box Hill North asks: "Over the years we have been told that large amounts of money have been put into the lives of indigenous Australians. Where has it gone? Can this latest 'emergency service' be carried out without waste of money?"

Wesley Aid, a member of the National Indigenous Council, the Gold Coast Native Title Group and the Bennelong Society board, warns: "It seems somehow odd to argue over land tenure or permits when the real objective is to instate a fundamental system of safety and order. It is important to get the priorities right."^[40]

Dario Mujkic from East Brunswick wrote to *The Age*, because he thinks that Mr Howard has not got these priorities right: "Howard apologises to the middle classes for a slight interest rate increase, but can't say sorry to indigenous Australians who have suffered generations of abuse and neglect."

As long as the Australian public, politicians and bureaucrats continue to regard us as little more than a nuisance, the dramatic gestures of the Commonwealth and states will simply become one more milestone of failure."^[41]

PART 5: IS THIS JUST? WHAT IS THE MORAL OR ETHICAL POSITION?

The following words of Jesus, called the Beatitudes, are part of the start of the so-called "Sermon on the Mount":

Matthew 5:6-7:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

All his life Jesus spoke on behalf of the poor and the powerless. In this case – and also according to the title of the "Little Children Are Sacred" report – it is the children being powerless, seeking for help. Jesus says that they will be blessed.

Jesus says that all the things one does to the poorest and weakest, one does to him:

Matthew 25:34-37

"Then the king will say to those at this right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'"

Jesus is teaching how important caregivers are and says: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

The care one gives to a member of God's family must honor God and God's whole family. Those who give care give it from God's spirit within themselves. In this situation caregiving means to help the children that cannot help themselves and expressing God's love by caring for them.

What happens to the indigenous children is not morally right. But the issue as it is dealt with at the present time is more likely to be a political issue rather than an issue in which people care about the lives of other people. The children have become a political tool rather than being those every politician should care about as they are the country's future.

But it is important to consider if the measures affecting all Aborigines are fair and just. The letter mentioned in part 1 from the Warlpiri man from the Northern Territories asks: "I do everything I know to help my kids, but Howard calls me a raper and will take half our money as punishment. Is this fair? How would you like that to happen to you?"^[1]

In my own opinion this is not just as well. I agree with the people saying that this a election year stunt and I think that a collective penalty is not right, because everybody should be considered not guilty unless proven otherwise. You could even say that Mr Howard is undermining the principles of a constitutional state.

Another principle of a state under the rule of law is that politicians are only responsible to their own conscience to prevent corruption. People have the right to opt politicians out of their office, but as long as they hold their office, it is up to them what they do. However, the public still can and should let the politicians know what their will is and persuade them to do what they think is right for everybody.

As an Australian citizen everybody has the right to decide what to do and what not to do, as long as it is not against law. In this case things to do may include writing to a newspaper, protesting against the way the Government introduces these measures or seeing the local Members of Parliament about it.

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