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**MEDIA RELEASE**



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**MINISTER URGED NOT TO COMPULSORILY ACQUIRE ALICE SPRINGS TOWN CAMPS**

*SUBMISSION DEADLINE TOMORROW*

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre strongly urges Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin not to exercise her discretionary power to compulsorily acquire Aboriginal town camps in Alice Springs.

“Taking the extraordinary step of compulsorily acquiring Aboriginal land on the pretence of ‘protecting Aboriginal people’ would doom the Federal Government’s objective of improving the lives of Aboriginal Australians to failure,” says Ben Schokman, a Senior Lawyer with the Human Rights Law Resource Centre.

In a written submission to Minister Macklin (attached), the Human Rights Law Resource Centre states that compulsory acquisition of the town camps will undermine the Federal Government’s objective of improving the lives of Aboriginal Australians, as well as severely damage the Rudd Government’s international reputation.

“Compulsory acquisition removes the opportunity for any participation by Aboriginal people. Policies targeted at addressing Aboriginal disadvantage will only be effective if Aboriginal people are directly involved in their development and implementation.”

“Compulsory acquisition of the Alice Springs town camps would be a drastic measure that would seriously damage and undermine the relationship between the Federal Government and Aboriginal Australians.”

“The international community will be extremely concerned if the Australian Government acts in a way that completely extinguishes the rights of Aboriginal people.”

“Compulsory acquisition would be in clear breach of a number of Australia’s international obligations to respect and promote the human rights of Aboriginal Australians.”

“The world is watching Australia’s treatment of its Aboriginal people, particularly since the United Nations last month labelled the Emergency Intervention policy racist,” says Schokman.

The Human Rights Law Resource Centre’s submission explains that rights of self determination and control over communal lands are fundamental for Aboriginal people and that such rights must be adequately protected for any policies with respect to Aboriginal people to be successful.

In August this year, the Minister wrote to Alice Springs town camp residents giving notice of her proposal to compulsorily acquire their land. For nearly 18 months the Minister has been seeking to acquire 40-year subleases over the town camps. When these negotiations broke down, the Minister threatened the exercise of her compulsory acquisition power. Under the Minister’s power, if the Commonwealth acquires the land of the town camps then all existing rights over the land held by Aboriginal people will end.

A petition against compulsory acquisition signed by Alice Springs town camp residents will be made to Minister Macklin tomorrow.

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