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PRESS RELEASE

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URGENT ACTION REQUESTED FROM THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE NORTHERN TERRITORY INTERVENTION

A group of 20 Indigenous Australians affected by the Northern Territory Intervention – introduced by the Howard Government and continued by the Rudd Government – has submitted a request for urgent action to the United Nations saying that Australia is in breach of its obligations under the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. The group will today march to the steps of Parliament House in Canberra to present to the Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin the request for urgent action, which was submitted to the United Nations last week.

The group of Alice Springs town camp and remote community residents is extremely concerned about the continuing serious and pervasive effects that the Northern Territory Intervention measures are having on Indigenous communities and, in particular, their traditional way of life. The submission requests that the UN Committee take urgent action by calling on the Australian Government to take immediate steps to reinstate the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act and to enter into significant and meaningful discussions with affected communities and individuals.

The group of Northern Territory residents are being assisted by a legal team including former Federal Court judge Ron Merkel QC and human rights lawyer George Newhouse, with substantial assistance being provided by the Human Rights Law Resource Centre. Speaking after the submission had been made to the UN Committee, Ben Schokman of the Human Rights Law Resource Centre said “The Northern Territory Intervention is manifestly discriminatory, arbitrary and unjust. These oppressive measures are targeted specifically at Indigenous people and impact on every individual in every community.”

Schokman said that the impact of the Northern Territory measures are made all the worse by the fact that they were imposed on Indigenous communities without any consultation with affected people and without any rights of appeal to review their operation. “It should be of great concern to the international community that legislation overriding the Race Convention can be implemented by the Australian Government unilaterally without any consultation, and with absolute impunity,” says Schokman.

Yesterday’s decision of the High Court of Australia upheld the constitutionality of the compulsory acquisition of Indigenous land, a key aspect of the Northern Territory Intervention measures.

However, the exclusion of the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 means that affected individuals are denied any opportunity to challenge the adverse impacts that the measures are having on them. “These people are therefore left with no option but to take their claim to the UN,” says Schokman.

Contact: Ben Schokman, Human Rights Law Resource Centre
0403 622 810 or ben.schokman@hrlrc.org.au