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Prime Minister Told of Neglect and Abuse in the Territory Four Years Ago, says Chair of Peak Indigenous Children’s Services Body

In response to the Federal Governments’ emergency child protection measures in the Northern Territory the Chairperson of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), Muriel Bamblett, has called for proper consultation with Indigenous organisations and communities in order to truly tackle the causes of child abuse.

“Indigenous agencies and communities have been crying out for a service response for decades,” Ms. Bamblett said today. “Four years ago SNAICC produced a report called *State of Denial* which called for a comprehensive framework and service response for child protection and family services in the Northern Territory. Both the territory and the Federal governments failed to respond.”

“I spoke to the Prime Minister about child abuse in the territory four years ago. He told me then that states and territories were doing fine,” she said.

“While we commend the Federal Government for recognising, belatedly, that this is a national emergency, the measures they say they will put in place are not the comprehensive child protection plan required to turn around abuse in remote communities.”

“This policy is ill considered and ‘media-release’ deep. Instead of implementing the recommendations of the *Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse* in co-operation with the Indigenous community and the NT Government, the Federal Government has run rough-shod over the work of the inquiry.”

“There are no measures in the Prime Minister’s statement to set up services for children who are abused or for the communities. What is to happen to them if they are found to be abused? There are no culturally competent therapeutic or kinship care services in the Territory.”

“If we had been consulted we would have given the Federal Government our professional advice that behaviour only changes when people are empowered and given positive encouragement. This punitive approach will only have a short term impact – it doesn’t address the underlying issues.”

“Rather than empower us to sort this out, this policy of taking away land and community control will take away responsibility and merely create further dependency.”

“We know that this is an emergency and Indigenous leaders have been saying this for years – but we will only solve the problems of child abuse if Aboriginal communities and professional services are empowered, engaged and drive this process.”

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