

## **CRA calls for reversal on indigenous rights**

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Australia must reverse its opposition to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) head, Fr Mark Raper SJ says.

"It is time for this country to build new relationships, to be open to future possibilities and not fear what can be built on these new foundations", Fr Raper said in a statement.

Referring to the February 13 parliamentary apology to Australia's stolen generations of indigenous people and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's recent world tour, Fr Raper said that given the present Australian government's commitment to re-engage with the United Nations it is time for Australia to "undertake the deep dialogue that will enable us to give meaningful acceptance of and support to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples".

Australia actively led strong, persistent opposition to the declaration before the UN General Assembly vote on September 13 last year, Fr Raper recalled.

"It was one of only four countries - with the United States, Canada and New Zealand - that voted against the non-binding declaration that outlines the rights of the world's estimated 370 million indigenous people and outlaws discrimination against them," he noted.

But the parliamentary apology change perceptions, Fr Raper said.

"The apology spoke to our hunger for healing and for reconciliation," he said. "We were moved and changed by it; a great burden was lifted.

"The truth has a way of setting us free and the apology will become a source of strength for further action - at home and abroad.

"Thanks to the leadership shown in the apology, and its world-wide impact, Australia is freed once again take a positive and dignified place in contributing to the efforts of international bodies," Fr Raper said.

"Facing our domestic issues frees us to engage deeply and honestly with the rest of the world.

"We can share both our struggles to do what is right, our successes, and even acknowledge our failures, encouraging the community of nations to address together our shared responsibilities, rather than withdrawing in defensiveness."

He said that within Australia, right relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians must be given expression in policies, legislation, the allocation of resources, and the operation of institutions, for which the release of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma's Social Justice Report for 2007 provided useful leads.

"The Federal Government's intervention in the Northern Territory needs to be revised to respect the Racial Discrimination Act and to meet this country's international human rights obligations," he said.

An important element of such change also must be deeper dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who rightly aspire to be the protagonists in their own story.

"The apology in itself does not alter the conditions of poverty and marginalisation of many Indigenous Australians, but it helps us know how to go forward in a respectful manner," he said.

Fr Raper will put these views to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin on behalf of CRA, the peak body for Australia's religious men and women, the statement concluded.

### **SOURCE**

Indigenous rights call for deep dialogue, (Catholic Religious Australia, Media Release, 14/4/08)

### **LINKS**

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Catholic Religious Australia