

# *Mercy Advocacy*

*“You will listen again, but not understand, see again, but not perceive. For the heart of this nation has grown coarse, their ears are dull of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, for fear they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed by me.”*

*- Is 42:1-4*



*Seeding the Future with Others*

*April 2014*

## Listening to the voices

**Miriam-Rose Ungumerr-Baumann AO**, elder from Nauiyu (Daly River), educator and artist.

*“What I want to talk about is another special quality of my people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called Dadirri. It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call 'contemplation'.”*



**Patrick Dodson** – Indigenous leader - ‘father of Reconciliation’  
Patrick Dodson called on Mr Abbott to convene a meeting of indigenous, political and industry leaders to set a new course based on engagement and end what he called the domination of ‘pre-Mabo thinking’ in indigenous policy.

*“We’ve got to get away from just thinking about program and policy and start thinking in terms of a relationship. Does Australia want to have a relationship with Aboriginal people, or does it not? Or does it simply want to improve the management and control systems over the lives of Aboriginal people? That’s the seminal issue. Everything to date has been about management. How do we keep them on reserves, isolated from public? Then how do we force them into some form of assimilation? And now? No one knows where it is going now. It’s a full-on assault on those areas where languages and cultures at least have been sustained. That’s a recipe for disaster because there is no evidence that people in cities and the towns have fared even better.”*





**Fred Chaney AO** - former Liberal Senator, in an open letter to the Prime Minister, WA Premier and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

*"The Premier has correctly identified that even reducing the number of those communities is going to be traumatic for the people involved and that it will affect regional towns and cities as people move into them. We can learn from history. What we are facing is a rerun of the 1960s when after the equal wage case people (were) moved from the stations to the nearby towns with disastrous social impacts..... I implore you to approach this matter on the basis of the careful examination by all governments of the future of these communities and the part they play in remote Australia. If your governments decide they are to cease to exist we must have transition policies which will treat people with the dignity every Australian is entitled to expect. Abbott's comments in Kalgoorlie suggest that the issues I raised in my letter have not been considered."*



**Warren Mundine** – chief adviser to PM on Indigenous Affair

*"That is a complete misconception of what it is and he's wrong in that regard, it is not about a lifestyle, it is not like retiring and moving for a sea change. It is about thousands of years' connection, their religious beliefs and the essence of who they are."*

Mr Mundine said native title laws were also an impediment to people moving out of indigenous communities because it would make it more difficult to prove their connection to the land. He also said there were ways to overcome educational barriers,



including sending children to regional boarding schools during the week.

Mr Mundine said he was frustrated by the Prime Minister's gaffes in the area of indigenous affairs because, of all the prime ministers and politicians he had worked with, he found Mr Abbott to be the one most genuinely committed to real change for indigenous Australians.

*"[Mr Abbott and John Howard] seem to be men trapped in their time but that's not to say that [Mr Abbott's] not one of the most generous and committed prime ministers in this area,"*



### ***Bill Shorten - Opposition Leader***

*"We have got to get Indigenous policy out of the political wing and back on track. I think Tony Abbott is genuinely interested in this issue but there is real anger and frustration about slow progress and unhelpful comments taking the discussion in all the wrong directions. It's time to sit down with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in a serious and considered way, to listen."*

*"While the main priority of the gathering should be to progress the key principles for constitutional change, it also presents a unique opportunity to build the relationship with critical leaders in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community which is necessary to forge a bipartisan approach in Indigenous affairs that is developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."*





Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in a statement released yesterday, the Chairman of the commission **Bishop Christopher Saunders**, asked:

*“Where is the lifestyle choice? Communities are under-serviced and patently there is insufficient listening to the voices of people in Aboriginal communities. We are forcing Aboriginal people out of their ancestral lands to live in regional towns. The reality is that when a community is closed down people and their families have nowhere to go, so they end up on the streets, separated from their land, heritage, family, culture and spirituality.”*



***Miriam Rose Ungumerr-Baumann***

*“We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves had to spend many years learning about the white man's ways. Some of the learning was forced; but in many cases people tried hard, over a long time, to learn the new ways. We have learned to speak the white man's language. We have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people in Australia to take time to listen to us. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for - respect and understanding....”*

To be still brings peace - and it brings understanding.





*I feel with my body, with my blood  
Feeling all these trees, all this country.  
When the wind blows you can feel it.  
Same for country,  
You feel it.  
You can look,  
But feeling ..... that make you.*

*Our story is in the land  
It is written in these sacred places.  
My children will look after those places, that's the  
law.*

*Dreaming place, you can't change it,  
no matter who you are.*

*Big Bill Neidjie – Gagudju Elder, Kakadu 2002*





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