

**Pacific Indigenous Peoples Preparatory meeting for the  
World Conference on Indigenous Peoples  
19 - 21 March 2013, Sydney Australia**

**Agenda Item: Militarisation**

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**Paper submitted by the Indigenous Peoples Organisation (IPO) Network of Australia - prepared by the Foundation for Indigenous Recovery and Development Australia (FIRDA).**

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**Introduction**

Throughout the history of each colonisation lies a history of militarisation that impacts each Indigenous community. We must not forget that Indigenous peoples were massacred or physically removed from their lands either by the invading armies or armed militia with the sanction of the Crown or another imperial authority. It has the effect of removing Indigenous peoples off their lands, including their sources of food, water and the ability to practice their cultural traditions. In other cases, Indigenous peoples were forced to live on missions or reserves, so that they would not be targeted by any military attack.

The impact militarisation has had on the land itself is undeniable. One example is the nuclear weapon testing by the British government on the Maralinga site, belonging to the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara peoples from 1955 to 1963. Lands that were used as a source of cultural knowledge and activities for these peoples were destroyed and made uninhabitable for the coming decades.

Disturbingly, even in recent years Indigenous peoples in Australia have suffered military style action that affects their civil, political and human rights. In response to the Little Children Are Sacred Report, in 2007 the federal government enacted a series of legislation and amendments known as The Northern Territory National Emergency Response (NTER). Instead of engaging the usual measures of crime deterrence, including community engagement strategies, the legislation imposed a veiled martial law over the 72 prescribed areas of lands affected. Some of these measures included:

- Forced seizure of lands acquired by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples;
- Forced income management regimes to quarantine welfare incomes into rations;
- Establishment of Government Business Managers in communities that were responsible for the welfare of the community, but had great control over each resident; and
- The enactment of Star Chamber powers by the government.

The Australian Army was initially deployed in many Aboriginal communities across Australia as part of the Intervention. Including but not limited to; Mutitjulu, Yuendumu,

Utopia, Titjikala and Santa Teresa. A Major General, Dave Chalmers was made the head of the NTER Task Force. While these forces were not used to harm or detain Aboriginal peoples, their presence was hugely intimidating for Aboriginal people at a time when many rights were being taken away and control over the communities was being seized by the government.

The “Star Chamber” powers remove civil rights for the purposes of investigations and enforcement of laws within communities. These powers are generally reserved for organised criminals and terrorists who are enemies of the state. Ordinary police officers were also given extra powers on Aboriginal lands, including removal of the need for a warrant before entering houses and cars. What follows from here is the prejudicial persecution of Indigenous communities, including arrests, assaults and detention.

If there is to be any hope of resolution and peacefulness between the settlers and the Indigenous communities, it is important that the previous undue militarisation of Indigenous communities and lands be acknowledged and compensated for justly. Further, it is crucial that any action to resolve any matters within the communities, whether it be domestic violence and/or poor socioeconomic circumstances, that free, prior and informed consent of these Indigenous peoples are attained first.

## **Recommendations**

We recommend that:

1. Military activities cannot take place on Indigenous lands without the free prior and informed consent of their traditional owners and after agreement on fair and just compensation and, where possible, with the option to return to their traditional lands.
2. Free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples must be obtained before the amendment of any social or legal infrastructure.