

Forced sterilisation alleged by women

BRUSSELS, day (AAP-Reuters) Aboriginal women were sterilised by in Australia because they were not considered suitable mothers, a group of Australian women at an international women's conference in Brussels yesterday

They said it was a common practice on cattle stations in Australia to black women their rations of food and tobacco only if they gave the usual favours.

The Australian women said they were representing Aborigines and were speaking in a private capacity. Aboriginal women suffered double discrimination because they were black and female.

The speakers accused the Australian Government of deliberately keeping silent on the treatment of Aborigines.

"Black women are sterilised by force, especially in the Northern Territory, because they are seen as unfit mothers", they said.

Black Aboriginal infants suffered one of the highest mortality rates in the world. Infection and malnutrition among adults were high, and among children they

were catastrophic, the group said.

A spokesman for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra said she had heard "rumours" similar to the claim that Aboriginal women were forcibly sterilised for about two years.

However, not one specific complaint had been received by authorities anywhere.

"For a start, forced sterilisation would be medical malpractice", she said.

One of the Aboriginal delegates at the Women and Politics Conference in Canberra last year had made similar allegations.

Of the allegations that black women were only given their weekly food and tobacco rations if they gave their sexual favours, the spokesman said, "I think it is a lot of nonsense".

Referring to the "slavery" charge, the spokesman said award wages were introduced in the Northern Territory for Aborigines in the last quarter of 1974 and applied to men as well as women.

"All Aborigines in Australia work on award wages now except for those on some Queensland Government settlements, who are paid 'training allowances'", she said.

These allowances were only a few dollars short of award-wage levels.

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An Australian Aboriginal woman said that black women were the most oppressed group in Australian society.

She said, "While white women have been exploited as housewives, black women have faced the double oppression of virtual slave labour on the sheep and cattle stations and in the