

## Northern Territory intervention violates international law, Gillian Triggs says

*Former human rights commissioner throws her support behind statement prepared with Indigenous elders that calls for the law to be repealed*



*Gillian Triggs says the NT intervention has harmed Indigenous communities since its introduction 10 years ago. Photograph: Mike Bowers for the Guardian*

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The former human rights commissioner Gillian Triggs has called for an end to the Northern Territory intervention and the government's cashless welfare card trial, labelling them violations of international law.

The professor is one of 200 prominent Australians, including Cathy Freeman, Ian Thorpe and former disability discrimination commissioner Graeme Innes, to support a statement prepared with Indigenous elders that calls the intervention a "crushing" failure.

Speaking at the University of Melbourne on Monday, Triggs said the NT intervention had 10 years ago.

"Assault and sexual assault convictions are about the same as before. Domestic violence has significantly increased. Incarceration of juveniles is now at world record heights.

"We've had a 500% rise in Indigenous youth suicide since the years 2007-11," she said.

The intervention, enacted in 2007 under the Howard government, suspended the application of the Racial Discrimination Act, enacted harsh penalties on alcohol and pornography, and removed customary laws in certain areas of the territory after reports of high rates of child sexual abuse.

In 2012, the Gillard government passed the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act, which extended the laws until 2022.

“The Act and its extension breach the Racial Discrimination Act, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the important Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” Triggs said.

“While it was nominally designed to protect children, it’s become a chilling act of political cynicism and opportunism, an overreach of executive decision-making, a failure of parliament and the manipulation of truth.”

She threw her support behind a statement that calls for an immediate repeal of the legislation, following similar statements from the Yolgnu Nations Assembly and the Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation.

“73 remote Aboriginal communities remain subjected to discriminatory legislation that no other Australian citizen endures in its crushing totality,” the statement said. “It is time to return dignity and human rights to Indigenous peoples living in remote Australia.”

The signatories include former Greens leader Bob Brown, former NT chief minister Claire Martin, novelist Alexis Wright, artist Bronwyn Bancroft and actor David Gulpillil.

Elizabeth Evatt, the former chief justice of the family court, is also a supporter alongside former Victorian Chief Magistrate Sally Brown and former appeal judge of the Victorian Supreme Court Frank Vincent.

The statement calls for the return of community control and self-determination, and asks for government cooperation on “productive remote employment programs without the threat of punishment and loss of income and impoverishment”.

Speaking on Monday, Triggs also condemned the NT’s BasicsCard and the government’s trial of cashless welfare cards in Western Australia and South Australia.

“There are significant problems with the card [and] the evidence on the ground is to the contrary. It is wrong and illegal as a matter of international law to penalise Aboriginal Australians where the impact of the BasicsCard is racially discriminatory.”