

## The Barunga Statement

We, the Indigenous owners and occupiers of Australia, call on the Australian Government and people to recognise our rights:

- to self-determination and self-management, including the freedom to pursue our own economic, social, religious and cultural development;
- to permanent control and enjoyment of our ancestral lands;
- to compensation for the loss of use of our lands, there having been no extinction of original title;
- to protection of and control of access to our sacred sites, sacred objects, artefacts, designs, knowledge and works of art;
- to the return of the remains of our ancestors for burial in accordance with our traditions;
- to respect for and promotion of our Aboriginal identity, including the cultural, linguistic, religious and historical aspects, and including the right to be educated in our own languages and in our own culture and history;
- in accordance with the universal declaration of human rights, the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, the international covenant on civil and political rights, and the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, rights to life, liberty, security of person, food, clothing, housing, medical care, education and employment opportunities, necessary social services and other basic rights.

We call on the Commonwealth to pass laws providing:

- A national elected Aboriginal and Islander organisation to oversee Aboriginal and Islander affairs;
- A national system of land rights;
- A police and justice system which recognises our customary laws and frees us from discrimination and any activity which may threaten our identity or security, interfere with our freedom of expression or association, or otherwise prevent our full enjoyment and exercise of universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We call on the Australian Government to support Aborigines in the development of an international declaration of principles for indigenous rights, leading to an international covenant.

And we call on the Commonwealth Parliament to negotiate with us a Treaty recognising our prior ownership, continued occupation and sovereignty and affirming our human rights and freedom.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE BARUNGA STATEMENT**

In the 1870's pastoralists and telegraph line construction crews followed the explorers; tin mining began in 1913 and continued until 1946. The Darwin – Mataranka railway was completed in 1928. During the war Katherine became a major army base, and many people moved in from all over the NT to work as labourers or drovers. After the war a ration station opened at Maranboy, but water shortages forced its removal first to the King River, and then east to Tandangal in 1948. The people were reluctant to settle at Tandangal because it was a sacred site, and so in 1951 the station was relocated again, on the Beswick Creek, an area rich in rock art. The settlement, known as Beswick Creek, was renamed Bamyili in 1965 and Barunga in 1984.

The people won freehold title to the 100ha former government station which is managed by Bamyili Community Council Inc. The community hosts the annual Barunga cultural and sporting festival. A statement of national Aboriginal political objectives issued to the federal government in June 1988 became known as the 'Barunga Statement'. Written on bark and presented to Prime Minister R.J.L. Hawke at that year's festival, it called for Aboriginal self-management, a national system of land rights, compensation for loss of lands, respect for Aboriginal identity, an end to discrimination, and the granting of full civil, economic, social and cultural rights. The Prime Minister responded by saying that he wished to conclude a treaty between Aboriginal and other Australians by 1990, but his wish was not fulfilled.

Source: <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/treaty/barunga.htm>