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## UN expert calls for culturally sensitive reforms for indigenous people in Australia



The Australian aboriginal flag flying in Victoria Square, Adelaide

9 March 2010 – Despite recent advancements in tackling the human rights of indigenous people in Australia, an independent United Nations expert today called on the country’s authorities to develop new social and economic initiatives and to reform existing ones to allow respect for cultural integrity and self-determination.

“Having suffered a history of oppression and racial discrimination, including dispossession of lands and social and cultural upheaval, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples endure severe disadvantage compared with non-indigenous Australians,” **said** James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

In his report issued following an official visit to Australia last August, the Special Rapporteur said that the so-called Northern Territory Emergency Response – a Government plan rolled out in 2007 to address problems faced by Aborigines, particularly women and children – contains problematic features from a human rights standpoint.

As part of the emergency response police were sent to Aboriginal areas to help curb alcohol abuse, sex abuse and domestic violence. The programme also contains provisions for compulsory income management, assertion of extensive powers by

the Commonwealth Government over Aboriginal communities, and alcohol and pornography restrictions.

“Effective control of their lands and territories continues to be denied to many indigenous communities in Australia,” the Special Rapporteur noted, voicing concerns over some aspects of the emergency response.

The programme continued in 2008, while Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered a national apology to indigenous peoples and called for a genuine partnership between the Government and indigenous communities to move towards a future “based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.”

In his report, Mr. Anaya recommended indigenous participation in the design, delivery, and monitoring of programmes, and promoting culturally-appropriate programmes that incorporate or build on indigenous people’s own initiatives.

“Governmental programmes must secure just social and economical well-being for indigenous peoples, while advancing their self-determination and strengthening their cultural bonds,” Mr. Anaya said.

The Rapporteur, who reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, serves in an unpaid and independent capacity.

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