

# Get Real

## Action towards real reconciliation

ANTaR Victoria is an association of concerned Victorians who are seeking justice for, and real reconciliation with, Indigenous communities. ANTaR Victoria works in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and believes that reconciliation is *white fella business* and therefore seeks to promote Indigenous rights and speak out against systemic and overt racism in Australian society. We therefore stand in solidarity with the hopes and aspirations of Indigenous peoples and, in the particular context of Victoria's Indigenous communities, support the framework documents recently produced by Victoria's State-wide and Peak Indigenous Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and the Victorian Traditional Owners Land Justice Group. Our aim in this document is to set down principles and actions for reform to inform discussion and debate in mainstream Victorian society. We intend to use this document to educate all levels of Government, NGOs, Faith based organisations, ethnic community organisations, and community groups, and advocate for reform to all levels of Government. This document builds on, and seeks the implementation of, the recommendations of *the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report (1991)*, the *Bringing Them Home Report (1997)* and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation *Declaration Towards Reconciliation (2000)*, *Road Map for Reconciliation(2000)* and *Final Report (2000)* Documents.

### Framework principles

#### Respecting and recognising Indigenous self-determination, human rights and culture

##### **1. Acknowledging the past and its impact on the present.**

The first step towards real reconciliation in Victoria is to acknowledge that Indigenous communities have been disempowered and marginalised by the process of invasion and colonisation. Colonisation has substantially disrupted Indigenous communities' political, economic, social, cultural, legal and spiritual systems and connection to their lands. However, despite colonisation, Indigenous communities have survived and remained resilient and many aspects of culture and connection to lands continue to this day. The disruptions and disconnections of the past are evidenced by Indigenous rates of disadvantage, impoverishment, poor health and incarceration. Indigenous communities continue to suffer from systemic, overt and covert forms of racism and discrimination. ANTaR believes that it is the responsibility of the general community and its various forms of political and legal governance to work with Indigenous organisations and communities to restore Indigenous social, economic, legal and political capacity.

## **2. *Self-determination and human rights***

The framework for reform must be based on the principle of respecting and recognising Indigenous self-determination and human rights. Self-determination and human rights are required to restore Indigenous communities' rights and their capacity to overcome disadvantage. The forms of self-determination which Indigenous communities express include:

- sovereignty - which acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters who have never ceded their sovereign rights;
- the self-determination of Indigenous peoples who have been forcibly removed from their traditional lands but are still 'peoples', as defined by international human rights conventions;
- self-determination as expressed in community controlled organisations and agencies;
- sovereignty and self-determination as evidenced by being resourced and allowed to act as equal partners in all matters that concern Aboriginal people.

Victoria's recently enacted Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities will put human rights firmly on the agenda in Victoria. Potentially it will provide a vehicle for monitoring and restoring basic rights for Victorian Indigenous communities.

## **3. *Recognising culture as best practice***

The framework for reform must also recognise that culturally inclusive approaches to issues of Indigenous disadvantage are the most effective. Culture is central to identity. Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us. Indigenous cultures are the longest continuing cultures in the world. They are sophisticated and holistic, linking spirituality with politics, education, economics, land care, and the law. By building on the strengths of culture, service approaches to Indigenous disadvantage are more likely to be successful.

## **4. *The 'white fella' business – addressing racism and interrogating 'whiteness'***

Finally, we recognise that there will never be lasting change until the non-Indigenous community deals with 'its problem' – that is, systemic, overt and covert racism. The non-Indigenous community is privileged by the spoils of colonisation which involved stealing land, culture and even children from Indigenous communities. These spoils continue to disadvantage Indigenous people and privilege the non-Indigenous inheritors of stolen goods. These privileges blind the non-Indigenous community to the debilitating effects of systemic racism and power of the dominant, colonial culture on Indigenous peoples. They also lead to the diminishing of non-Indigenous humanity through the cross-cultural misunderstanding and power dynamics which maintain 'white blindness'.

## **Framework for Action**

### **Enhancing self-determination and restoring capacity**

In line with the principles as expressed above, ANTaR Victoria calls on all levels of Government, NGOs Faith based organisations, ethnic community organisations and all community groups to:

- work with the Traditional Owners Land Justice Group to establish a framework agreement which recognises and resources the sovereignty of traditional owners and their rights to speak for country and heritage, including the return of land to traditional owners and co-management of parks and natural resources;
- support all native title claimant groups and specifically call on the State Government to negotiate all native title matters in a way which resolves underlying aspirations for land justice;
- work with State-wide and Peak Indigenous NGOs to establish a framework agreement which recognises and resources their role in the delivery of services to Indigenous communities
- work with local Indigenous communities and local community controlled organisations to establish appropriate protocols, relationships and forms of local recognition to enhance the lives of Indigenous people;
- work with Indigenous community controlled organisations and local Indigenous communities to establish ways in which develop an economic base for local communities and employment opportunities for individuals;
- work with Indigenous community controlled organisations and local Indigenous communities to address the needs of Indigenous families, including healing strategies for those suffering the effects of intergenerational trauma and the policies of child removal; and
- establish, resource and support local, regional and State-wide representational structures and protocols to inform policy which recognise all four forms of Indigenous self-determination (as listed under Framework Principles).

ANTaR Victoria believes that every organisation can apply these strategies (as relevant) within their own organisational policy and procedure frameworks and advocate for these strategies to be adopted within other organisations.

### **Anti-racism campaigns and encouraging cultural competency**

In line with the principles above, ANTaR Victoria calls on Governments to

- fund a public education campaign outlining the truth of the past, the effects of racism, the contribution of Indigenous cultures to the national heritage and the need for reconciliation;
- ensure the teaching of the truth of the past and cultural respect in schools;
- encourage mainstream service providers to develop partnership arrangements with Indigenous community controlled organisations that ensure that there are proper protocols in place and that they are culturally sensitive, culturally competent and accessible; and

- encourage all Governments, agencies and community groups to make statements of acknowledgement and incorporate recognition of Indigenous traditional ownership/custodianship in their Constitutions.

## **Actions for citizens for reconciliation**

We would encourage individuals and community groups to take action to show respect and support for Victoria's Indigenous people by;

- lobbying your local councillors and State/Federal politicians to accept the above principles and action plans,
- encouraging awareness of Indigenous issues and the need for reconciliation in your various community groups, schools and workplaces,
- seeking appropriate and respectful relationships with your local Indigenous community, and
- working towards a local or regional agreement between the Indigenous community, the various levels of Government, and other non-Indigenous organisations to provide appropriate recognition of sovereignty and ownership, and sustained support for services in health, education, employment and other aspects of development of the Indigenous community.

## **Questions for politicians, organisations and community groups**

1. How would you promote the self determination of Indigenous people?
2. Do you acknowledge that Indigenous communities have been dispossessed and marginalised by the process of colonisation? How?
3. What are your policies for implementing land justice in Victoria?
4. What will your party/organisation do to build the capacity of Indigenous organisations and communities to overcome the effects of marginalisation and racism?
  - in relation to developing resilience in Indigenous children and young people?
  - in relation to health?
  - in relation to education?
  - in relation to employment?
  - in relation to the justice system?

## **Further reading**

Further information on the ANTaR Victoria website [www.antarvictoria.org.au](http://www.antarvictoria.org.au) includes

- *Towards a Framework Agreement between The State of Victoria and the Victorian Traditional Owner Land Justice Group*
- *A Fairer Victoria for Aboriginal Communities: A Framework for Action* (Victorian Aboriginal peak and state-wide organisations)
- *What can I do?* ANTaR matrix for action