



# Ending the Violence in Indigenous Communities

National Press Club Address, November 2016

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**Marcia Langton**

**Josephine Cashman**

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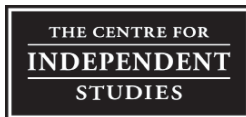
# Ending the Violence in Indigenous Communities

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**Josephine Cashman**

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Foreword by Charlie King

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# Introduction

**Sara Hudson**

**T**he Centre for Independent Studies is pleased to publish this collection of compelling speeches about Indigenous violence by Jacinta Price, Marcia Langton and Josephine Cashman. We are proud to have played a role in helping them share their insights, and in elevating the experiences of the victims of domestic violence to the national stage.

The event at the National Press Club followed a very powerful talk given by Jacinta Price for CIS's inaugural Helen Hughes Lecture for Emerging Thinkers. After the talk, we felt more Australians needed to hear what Jacinta was saying. Marcia and Josephine had also shared their frustrations in trying to get Canberra to pay attention to the No More campaign.

Our hope is that this publication will contribute to an ongoing discussion about what all Australians can do to address the epidemic of violence in many Indigenous communities. It is good to see Australian political leaders now getting behind the No More campaign, but we need more than just symbolic gestures.

Many brave Indigenous women and men have battled over the years to try and combat the scourge of violence in their communities. However, much of their work and the plight of Indigenous women has gone unnoticed by the media and the general public.

Family violence is a problem faced by all Australians. However, Indigenous Australians — and women in particular — are much more likely to experience significant harm from an intimate partner than non-Indigenous women.

Of the recorded deaths this year due to violence against women, 20% (16 out of 79) were Indigenous women.<sup>1</sup> And Indigenous women are also 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of domestic

violence than non-Indigenous women and 70 times more likely to be hospitalised for a brain injury.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, many non-Indigenous people have turned a blind eye to the violence they have witnessed, or been too afraid to speak out for fear they will be accused of being racist. But Australians can no longer ignore the ‘contagion’ of violence facing many Indigenous communities. As Edmund Burke said: “evil triumphs when good people do nothing.”

We can all learn a lesson from the late Helen Hughes, who was known for her forthrightness and candour. Helen never feared public backlash for voicing her opinions, no matter how unpopular they were. Her strong sense of social justice overrode any notions of political correctness. And on the circumstances facing Indigenous Australians she was clear: “All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders — women as well as men — must have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other Australians.”<sup>3</sup>

**Sara Hudson is a Research Fellow and Indigenous Research Program Manager at the Centre for Independent Studies**

1. Available at: <http://blackfeministranter.blogspot.com.au/p/since-beginning-of-year-following.htm> (Accessed: 29 November 2016)
2. Spinney, A. and Cripps, K. (2016) FactCheck Q&A: Are indigenous women 34-80 times more likely than average to experience violence? Available at: <https://theconversation.com/factcheck-qanda-are-indigenous-women-34-80-times-more-likely-than-average-to-experience-violence-61809> (Accessed: 29 November 2016).; Bowden, T. (2015) Family violence sees three women hospitalised per week with brain injuries: Advocate. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-12/family-violence-sees-women-hospitalised-with-brain-injuries/6692682> (Accessed: 29 November 2016).
3. Hughes, H. (2007) Lands of shame: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ‘homelands’ in transition. Australia: Centre for Independent Studies, p 4.

# Foreword

**Charlie King**

**F**or a number of years now I have been in dialogue with Professor Marcia Langton and Josephine Cashman — sometimes agreeing and sometimes not — about the role of Aboriginal men and the conversation about family violence. Change for Aboriginal women will occur when men take responsibility and become part of the solution.

The strength of the National Press Club speeches organised by the Centre for Independent Studies, and the strong women's voices, talk directly to us as Aboriginal men. And as Aboriginal men we do not have to be discouraged, as there is a way forward — and more and more men are finding pathways that support changing attitudes towards violence.

We want our families to live healthy, connected and fulfilled lives, this means living in homes and communities free from violence. The challenge for Aboriginal men and arguably all Australian men is to really confront what is happening to women and children and to understand that change needs to come from all of us.

Confronting Aboriginal men in a collective way about their behaviour and ingrained attitudes towards women is not easy, but it must happen — and it must happen urgently. The picture described by Marcia, Josephine and Jacinta is a shameful one, but it can be changed.

We need to look beyond what we have always done and be prepared to venture into different ways of thinking. Throughout Australia, I see an emergence of Aboriginal men's groups who want to lead a change. The solution requires Aboriginal people being given the mandate and responsibility to take leadership in this area.

The recent coronial inquiry into the brutal deaths of two women in Alice Springs, by the hands of their partners, repeatedly highlighted an unwillingness of victims to cooperate with the police. This was for a range of reasons but primarily to do with pressure from the victim's families, who would continue to perpetrate abuse on the victims for 'failing' their husbands.

It highlights the challenge and complexity of the justice response. Preventing domestic and family violence occurring in the first place has to be the ultimate goal and the area of priority investment. Otherwise, we will continue to provide band-aid solutions to what is an actual epidemic.

Both Marcia and Josephine saw a glimmer of hope in the NO MORE Campaign — a prevention campaign aimed at changing attitudes about women through awareness raising and direct action. The campaign works directly with Aboriginal men and communities to identify men who want to be different and who can lead the way in their own communities to take action.

We need to be able to have honest conversations with Aboriginal men that talk to the very raw issues raised in the presentations. The response can be outraged offence or passive helplessness, but more and more I see a shift... many men do want to change. The NO MORE Campaign aims to drive a message that gives men the knowledge and the capacity to confront what is unacceptable.

More can be done. Governments need to have a mechanism that listens to the voices of Aboriginal experts. Ignoring the advice from these three Aboriginal women would be senseless.

They are asking for nothing less than for Aboriginal women and children to be afforded the dignity of safety as a right.

**Charlie King is an Indigenous journalist and sports commentator based in the Northern Territory. He has been a longstanding and active proponent of the anti-violence efforts in the community.**

# Violence and Silence

Jacinta Price

**B**efore I begin today I want to acknowledge that I would not be here without the support of my husband who encourages me to always speak the truth.

As many have been aware, Australian citizens are dying at alarmingly high rates because of family violence. These Australian citizens are Aboriginal women and their children, who are this country's most marginalised people.

Many of you are aware of the statistics following the police commissioners report and there are those of us who have known the Aboriginal family violence crisis has been playing out for a very long time and yet has never been properly addressed.

I have known about this crisis all my life. I recall an incident at Christmas in our family home when I was about nine. The husband of a woman in my family became violent and aggressive after consuming alcohol. He and the woman began to argue as they both became intoxicated. It escalated to the point where my father ordered the man to leave our house.

As he left, he took a fist full of his 18-month-old son's hair and lifted him by his scalp until his arm was fully extended to the side of his body. He flung the toddler about in front of us all — including his three-year-old daughter. He threatened to kill his son if his wife continued to disobey him.

I remember the blank look in the boy's eyes ... he didn't cry out. He just dangled silently from his hair.

It was blatantly obvious this toddler had endured violence such as this many times and he had become desensitized to it.

My parents acted swiftly to call the police to arrest the man. However following this there were many more incidents, including one where he broke his wife's jaw, another two when he had put her into ICU; and on one of those occasions she was close to death.



Despite this she went on to have a child to him, even after knowing what her step-children had been subject to. In fact, she stayed with him until the day he hanged himself ... and she was the one to find his body.

She has since looked after his mother in fear that her in-laws will blame her for his death; as traditionally a wife is often blamed for the death of her husband. In fact, I have known of some cases of women being ordered to submit sexually to the male relatives of her deceased husband for not fulfilling the correct duties of a wife, which is to take care of her husband even if he is a perpetrator of violence.

I could spend days giving examples of acts of family violence that I have been witness to or learned of within my own family in remote communities... Where I am related to both victim and perpetrator and where the kinship network demands loyalty to your family members even if they are a perpetrator.

One is expected to pretend that these perpetrators are decent human beings and ignore the fact that they have committed acts of physical and sexual violence towards those you love. Because to speak the truth is to create conflict. So from early in life, everyone learns to lie to keep the peace — which manifests into child and youth suicide and the continuation of a destructive cycle.

I have given just a glimpse of examples of violence that some Aboriginal women experience. The number of deaths due to homicide that have impacted my family is in the hundreds. And in the NT alone for Aboriginal families it is in the thousands. But this epidemic is not only occurring in remote areas but within urban Aboriginal communities as well. The code of silence that victims live in blankets both remote and urban Australia.

In remote communities, traditional culture is shrouded in secrecy, which allows perpetrators to control their victims. Culture is used as a tool by perpetrators in defense of their violent crimes, or as reasons to perpetrate those crimes. But as myself, Marcia and Josephine continue to highlight: this is not acceptable. It is not acceptable that any human being have their human rights violated, denied and utterly disregarded in the name of culture.

It is a national shame that in our recent history, Aboriginal male perpetrators have got away with their crimes based on the argument that they were operating within their culture's confines. Other excuses

include that Aboriginal men themselves are victims of colonisation and dispossession so therefore we must empathise with them and excuse their violent behaviour.

It is apparently far more important not to offend them, than it is to speak honestly about Australian citizens being killed in this country.

Aboriginal researcher Suzanne Ingram made the point in her article that... “In the 70’s some female Aboriginal leaders decided that “standing as a people” was more important than signing up for the mainstream feminist agenda. Forty years later Aboriginal women still face pressure to prioritize racial solidarity – to act as “solidarity stewardesses serving a sophisticated silencing agenda” – rather than speak up about domestic abuse within their own communities.

We have recently been made aware of Marlene Cummins story and her experience in the Aboriginal Black Panther Party. She believed she had to sacrifice her rights as a woman for the greater good of a movement she felt would benefit all Aboriginal people. So she remained silent when she suffered sexual and physical abuse at the hands of Aboriginal men.

Unfortunately, within Aboriginal Australia the remnants of the ideology to stand in solidarity with your people and remain silent on internal abuse is still deeply engrained.

It exists within communities where men regarded as ‘elders’ have been known to abuse their power by perpetrating physical and sexual violence while their family and their close circles support them.

In fact, often they will support them to the point where they will even appear alongside the perpetrator in court to intimidate and threaten the victims and the victims’ female supporters. And we see this happen even in cases where there is proven to have been years of sexual abuse of a child.

Everybody in this country must condemn this kind of vile behaviour. It must not be tolerated. These abhorrent acts of blatantly threatening behaviour toward a young victim and her female supporters are examples of exactly what Aboriginal women and children are hard up against.

Would we sit back and allow the supporters of the church to behave this way toward victims of child sexual abuse by men of the cloth? No. We actively and openly condemn these acts without fear of the politically correct labeling us and without fear of the families and

supporters of the church threatening us with violent retaliation. And no more can we silence our fellow non-Indigenous Australians who stand by us on this issue — despite calls for silence — simply because they are not Aboriginal themselves. The concern for Aboriginal women and children should be everyone's concern. And we as a country should be able to address this issue. Because only when we take full responsibility can we bring about solutions to this epidemic.

We cannot solve this problem alone; and the women and the children who are the most marginalized in this country need all the support they can get.

Before I finish I would like to add that I have been placed under immense pressure to withhold some of what I spoke about today. What I have shared may put my immediate family at risk of retaliation of violence and the possibility that employment opportunities may be impacted. Some close to me have also expressed their concerns. But why am I standing here if not to hold us all to account for the lack of responsibility, action and justice for these Aboriginal women and children — and the thousands of victims of family violence and sexual-abuse.

Why am I standing here if not to prevent yet another funeral of a family member victim of homicide. The NT's local newspapers on a weekly basis are riddled with stories of family violence and homicide ... and I become part of the problem if I do not speak out.

I have found however, that as I stand in defiance of years of violence and silence, I continue to gain the support of many Aboriginal men — in my family, in my community and across this country — who understand that family violence is wrong. I am also witnessing more Aboriginal women coming forward and breaking their silence knowing that they have the support to do so.

So I call upon the federal, state and territory governments to take this matter more seriously ... to ensure the safety of Aboriginal women and children by upholding their human rights.

I call upon the federal government to do what has been done in light of Aboriginal youth in detention; hold a royal commission into the countless homicides, acts of violence, and sexual abuse, perpetrated against this country's most marginalised citizens.

We have all been made aware, and must start to address, the reality of the crisis that has been played out for far too long. So that real change may finally take place.

# If we don't stop the violence, we have no chance of closing the gap

**Marcia Langton AM**

Ladies and gentlemen, I acknowledge the traditional owners and you, for listening. You will hear many more accounts of the violence suffered by Aboriginal women and children. The data and our own experiences tell us that we are confronting rates of violence that seem beyond explanation.

In 2014, The National Indigenous Intelligence Taskforce of the Australian Crime Commission reported on violence and child abuse in the Indigenous population, and Josephine Cashman will say more about this.

Further, we have more details on this violence from open sources such as the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Productivity Commission, or OID, which released its excellent 2016 report early this morning, and, as well, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

In the last reporting period — 2014-2015 — almost a quarter of the entire Indigenous Australian population over the age of 15 reported that they had been victims of physical or threatened violence in the last 12 months. OID 2016: 22% Indigenous adults (18+) in 2014-15 NATSISS reported experiencing physical or threatened violence in previous 12 months — importantly the 2016 OID notes that this is pretty much unchanged since 2002 survey data, except for 18-24yo that have decreased from 33% to 24% over this period (though the decrease isn't necessarily significant or different, given the small sample). Proportions remain similar for males and females and by remoteness over time. After age standardisation, rate for Indigenous is around twice the rate for non-Indigenous for 2002 and 2014-15.

Indigenous females were 32 times as likely to have been hospitalised as non-Indigenous females during the period July 2011 to June 2013.

OID 2016: In 2014-15 hospitalisation (age standardised) rates for Indigenous females for family violence (FV) related assaults were 32 times the rate for non-Indigenous females (and for males 23 times the rate) increasing over time (for Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and increase as remoteness increases (Indigenous 42 times rate of non-Indigenous in remote areas in 2014-15). Ratio is highest for 35-44 yo and lowest for 0-14yo in 2014-15. But note that nationally ratios have decreased since 2012-13 (all jurisdictions) due to decrease in Indigenous rates (females and males), but ratios remain higher for the subset of jurisdictions since the baseline of 2004-05.

Indigenous males were 8 times as likely to have been hospitalised for assault as non-Indigenous males. OID 2016: yes for current year of 2014-15, but for females this rate for total assaults for Indigenous females was 29 times the rate for non-Indigenous females.

Indigenous hospitalisation rates for assault were highest in remote and very remote areas (28 and 23 per 1,000 respectively) compared with 4 per 1,000 in major cities. OID 2016: for total assaults in 2014-15 the rate was highest in remote and very remote areas (around 2%) compared with major cities (0.4%)

Rates of hospitalisation for assault for Indigenous females were: 51 times the non-Indigenous female rate in remote areas and 63 times the non-Indigenous female rate in the NT. Rates of hospitalisation for assault for Indigenous females were: 51 times the non-Indigenous female rate in remote areas and 63 times the non-Indigenous female rate in the NT.

In 2014-15, the hospitalisation rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people for both assaults and FV related assaults were highest in the NT compared to other jurisdictions. Ratio in the NT for FV related assaults was 62:1 (for total assaults was 18:1)

There were 192 Indigenous deaths in 2010-14 due to assault. The mortality rate for assault for Indigenous Australians was around 7 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians in this period. OID 2016 states that 192 Indigenous deaths in 2014-15 (ABS data) were homicide deaths (not assault-related deaths) for 5 available jurisdictions – with just over half in the 25-44 yo age group. Largest number (and rate) of these were in NT followed by WA. The mortality rate for assault for Indigenous Australians was around 7 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians

in this period. But statistics have a way of lying: these statistics have been flattened out to reflect a national picture that belies the reality in the thousands of remote and rural Indigenous populations across Australia.

The Bill Leak case – involving complaints under Section 18c of the Racial Discrimination Act for causing offence on the grounds of race and a nasty, strident national debate – has exposed many of the fault lines in the Indigenous population’s response to antisocial behaviour by Indigenous men. Bill Leak’s cartoon published in *The Australian* on 28 July this year, showed an Aboriginal child being handed back by a police officer to an apparently drunk father who cannot remember his son’s name. Thousands of people claimed that this was a racist stereotype, and that they were offended by it. Aboriginal social media activists took to Twitter under the Twitter hash tag #IndigenousDads posting family snapshots of Indigenous fathers and their children. By my count there were about 70 living fathers. Many other happy snaps showed adult children with their deceased fathers.

But where are the other #IndigenousDads?

As much as their love for their fathers is honourable and admirable, it must be said that these lucky children of decent Aboriginal men missed the point. According to ABS projections, there are an estimated 744,956 Indigenous Australians, representing 3% of the total Australian population in 2016.

So where are the other 200,000 or so Indigenous fathers and what are they like? Again, let’s turn to the data: Just under 10,000 of them are serving time in prisons for acts intended to cause injury, sexual assault and other crimes.

At 30 June 2015, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners accounted for just over a quarter (27% or 9,885 prisoners) of the total Australian prisoner population, while representing 2% of the adult Australian population aged 18 years and over.

And where are there children? About more than 3,000 of them are neglected or have been removed from their families to protect them. At 30 June 2015, almost 17,000 were under care and protection orders. At 30 June 2015, a further 15,455 were in out-of-home care.

Remember, all of these figures are on the low side, because of the fear gripping the Indigenous community that prevents them from reporting assault, rape, and other crimes:

In 2014-15, Indigenous children were 7 times as likely to be receiving

child protection services as non-Indigenous children.<sup>1</sup> Further, in 2014-15, there were 11,675 Indigenous children with substantiated notifications (27% of the total children with substantiated notifications, 42,457).

This is the information I received this week from the Brisbane Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service which runs 19 clinics in South East Queensland: "The clients in this cohort have attended our clinics, had a health check and been referred on to our social health team." In a four-month period, 64% of 437 vulnerable clients seeking treatment for mental health or drug and alcohol issues in three Aboriginal medical clinics in South East Queensland were found to have conditions or injuries resulting from domestic violence.

OID 2016 includes data on people seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services – with Indigenous people over-represented for people receiving assistance (around one in four) with around 23% of this group seeking assistance for DV/FV.<sup>2</sup>

At 30 June 2015, 5.3 per cent of Indigenous children (age 0-17) were in out of home care compared to only 0.6 per cent of non-Indigenous children.

OID 2016 notes that as at 30 June 2015, 67% of Indigenous children in out-of-home care have been placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

In the family violence chapter of the 2016 OID report two case studies were to demonstrate what works to improve outcomes: the Alice Springs Domestic and Family Violence Outreach Service and the Yuendumu Mediation and Justice Committee (both in the NT). However, as noted by Karen Chester (deputy chair, PC) in the media release for the 2016 OID, "If we are to see improvements in outcomes we need to know which policies work and why. But the overwhelming lack of robust, public evaluation of programs highlights the imperative for Indigenous policy evaluation" said Deputy Chair Karen Chester.

Nationally, in the five years before these data were released in 2015, the rate of Indigenous children who were the subject of child protection substantiations increased 10 per cent while for non Indigenous this rate increased by only one per cent. We see the same rate increases for that period for care and protection orders. And again, the same rate increases for children receiving out-of-home care.<sup>3</sup>

There is a growing network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who want to tackle this rising tide of violence and disintegration

of our families. We have formed an informal network and meet by teleconference monthly, organise events, support each other and share information. We are each experts in particular areas and have recognised that the accelerating levels of violence against Indigenous women and children represent the most dangerous threat to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. The information we share is aimed at putting together an accurate picture of this disaster and policy and program reforms in policing, court, social security, child protection and health that will be effective and evidence-based to support the thousands of victims and change the behaviour of the thousands of perpetrators.

My colleague Josephine Cashman will tell you about the glaring failure of this Third Action Plan to reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. It recommends that cases of violence against Indigenous women and children should be dealt with, and I quote, through ‘activities that provide wraparound, case-managed support for families, and encourage behavioural change without resorting to police or courts’.

Indigenous women who are involved in ending the violence against us are asking this question: Why would the Third National Action Plan to end Violence recommend that police and courts not be involved in the rising tide of violence against us?

What about the rule of law, so highly valued by all major political parties and the bedrock of Australian society?

I am calling it ‘drinking the Kool Aid.’ The no doubt sincere and well meaning people who wrote the Third Action Plan, and people I have met in governments with key responsibilities in this area, have been told by Aboriginal leaders that these levels of violence and abuse are ‘cultural,’ and yet when I ask what that might mean, they have no answers. What do the Aboriginal leaders mean when they give this deadly advice? They are referring to a new version of Aboriginal culture that keeps a few elements of the older culture and adds a new set of elements, the worst of which is rule of women and children by older men, using force, assault, forced detention, capital and corporal punishment and sexual assault of both adults and children, all illegal under Australian laws, but increasingly condoned in the Aboriginal world as a form of traditional law.

If these practices were traditional laws, there would be no Aboriginal society in existence today. If we look at the Indigenous homicide rates, assault and hospitalization rates, incarceration rates, rates of removal<sup>4</sup> of Aboriginal children, we see a rapidly disintegrating society. This is not



the society of old. We are witnessing the Stockholm Syndrome writ large by Indigenous perpetrators and their victims, and their government and agency partners, explaining this horrible situation as a matter of 'culture.' The irony that this is the most racist of all stereotypes – so much worse than Bill Leak's cartoon of an Aboriginal man asking the police officer his son's name – seems to be completely lost on them.

To make these observations is to break ranks with the Kool Aid brigade. Insults are hurled at us for deserting our 'brothers.' Far from it; we have long recommended effective programs for changing the lives of domestic violence perpetrators for their sake and for the sake of the victims. Charlie King's No More Campaign in the Northern Territory is the most effective program with reach into the Aboriginal world. In one community, his program reduced violence rates by 70 per cent at Ramingining. We also want more support for the victims, who are routinely ignored in the fashionable rush to perpetrator behavioural change programs. Several reforms were announced at COAG: a national Domestic Violence Order scheme, a national information sharing system; and the development of national perpetrator standards.

We believe that much more is needed for the Indigenous victims so that they have integrated and effective support during the regular crises, episodes of violence and community mayhem from which they need safe haven. We are agreed that there should be a National Taskforce of highly qualified Indigenous women and men appointed to it to identify the programs and policies that work and that are most urgent. No one has a chance of closing the gap on any disadvantage without putting a stop to the violence against Indigenous women and children.

## Endnotes

1. Child protection rates are calculated for children aged 0-17 years.
2. (similar to non-Indigenous proportion, but remember first level of over-representation).
3. Between 2010-11 and 2014-15 rates for children on care and protection orders increased:
4. Indigenous: from 43.0 to 57.5 per 1,000
5. Non-Indigenous: from 5.5 to 6.3 per 1,000 (slight increase but relatively stable).  
Between 2010-11 and 2014-15 rates of children receiving out-of-home care increased: Indigenous: from 43.2 to 52.5 per 1,000 children. Non-Indigenous: from 5.2 to 5.5 per 1,000 children (slight increase but relatively stable).

# Lack of response prevents progress

**Josephine Cashman**

**T**hree years ago, when I was asked to be on the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, I felt immensely privileged, yet shouldered an immense responsibility. This responsibility has followed me throughout my childhood. It followed me into my work in health at Wallaga Lake and as a senior lawyer in Arnhem Land, and most recently it followed me to Geneva, where earlier this year, I was invited to address the full United Nations Human Rights Council in an historic session on violence against Indigenous women.

My interest in community safety came after living and working in the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal community in the late 1990s. Wallaga Lake is a community about four hours from Canberra by road, and I worked there in my early twenties as a trainee at a local Aboriginal medical service. During this time, the prevalence of child sexual assault and domestic violence became very apparent to me. There are at least two serial child-sex offenders in this community who, throughout their lives, have wreaked havoc and severely traumatised many community members. These criminals are responsible for raping children and destroying their futures. They got away with their crimes in this community, as happens in many others, because of an environment where paedophilia and extreme violence goes unreported.

This culture of silence allows criminals to gain power over communities and establish unfettered access to children through fear, which perpetuates a misguided tolerance of criminal behaviour. Within this culture of silence, the police are the enemy, and anyone who reports or talks to them is called a dog and a snitch for collaborating

with White authority. Victims who report violence and rape often find that police responses range from slow to non-existent, so they also fear that the police will not follow through with their complaints leaving them exposed to further violence and payback, the risk of becoming homeless, and reprisals from the families of offenders, who are usually co-dependent in supporting their offending behaviours.

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's Final Report of the National Indigenous Intelligence Task Force 2006–2014 found that Indigenous children remain at a greater risk of being abused. In some remote communities, they found that every person has reportedly been affected by child sexual abuse as a victim, a perpetrator, or a relative of either.

Violence in these communities is extreme. It is normalised. It escalates rapidly, and often involves weapons. Domestic violence is widely tolerated and, increasingly, includes young couples. In most remote communities, children are routinely exposed to violence, and the extent and severity of intimate partner rape and sexual assault almost certainly remains hidden. There are also clear links between suicide, self-harm and associated alcohol and substance abuse, and domestic violence, relationship breakdowns, and early life trauma from child abuse. Service providers and community members are limited in their abilities to address mental health issues and identify children at risk of alcohol and substance abuse, and to determine whether a threat is real and respond appropriately.

It was an adult victim of child sexual assault at Wallaga, Lucy, that was the catalyst for me leaving the New South Wales south coast with my infant child to start a Journalism and Law degree in Sydney. I naively thought that becoming a journalist would provide me with unfettered opportunities to expose these uncomfortable truths of the suffering of Aboriginal men, women and children in our country. Lucy had six children and was a good mother. Though every time she had a baby, she suffered from chronic postnatal depression, drank excessively, and did not cope. I was informed that, as a child, Lucy has been repeatedly raped by a distant relative, yet didn't feel she could tell anyone about this. She drank to block out the horrific truth that she lived in a community where this offender walked freely and

unchallenged. Were she to report him, she ran the risk of becoming homeless, as his family, including his female relatives, would have threatened her own safety and that of her children.

Lucy rang the local medical service every day requesting that someone see her newborn baby. With no transport to go to the local doctors, I went straight to her house on the reserve. The infant was pale white with bright red spots all over her face. I knew there was something wrong as her parents have a dark brown complexion. I rang the local nurse and the local doctor came straight away, but the baby died two days later from a heart murmur.

Before my visit, most of Lucy's calls had been ignored and she'd been dismissed as a troubled drunk. I challenged this at the AGM of the Aboriginal medical service I worked for, and spoke of my disappointment over the death of Lucy's baby. My boss's response was to pick up a chair and throw it at my head because he thought I was blaming him. Within two weeks, I'd enrolled in university and committed my life to amplifying the voices of people like Lucy, and working with other Aboriginal women to bring about a chance for justice and peace for future generations.

At the Wallaga Lake community, I witnessed daily domestic violence, and it was not uncommon to hear women's screams throughout the night. Many Aboriginal men in this community thought they were weak if they didn't control their girlfriends or wives, and saw women as objects to control. These men did not grow up with good role models and lived in fear that their peers would see them as weak if they did not put women in their place by means of jealousy, threats, the use of weapons, put-downs, and public humiliation. What created this was a combined lack of support for women, children and the rule of law, which is now reflected in Australia's worsening statistics for Indigenous incarcerations, suicide, and child removals.

The empowerment of women and girls is embedded throughout Australia's foreign policy, economic diplomacy, and the overseas aid programs. DFAT has a very comprehensive process when it comes to its aid programs, as gender equality must be integrated into all programs, regardless of sector or geographic location. DFAT's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy sets priorities that guide its work

in embedding gender equity throughout our foreign policy, economic diplomacy and overseas aid programs. At a minimum, DFAT aims to avoid exacerbating gender inequalities, and to ensure that women and men benefit from its interventions equally. DFAT seeks to enhance women's voices in decision-making, leadership and peace-building, and at least 80% of its aid program investments needs to demonstrate real progress in addressing gender equality issues.

If we, as Australians, can write these provisions into our foreign aid programs, why can we not do the same for our Indigenous affairs programs? I was surprised when I advised a senior government figure that funding agreements with Aboriginal organisations should be linked to a minimum number of women on their boards and compulsory training on minimum standards of behaviour for community-controlled organisations. He said that this would not work because it is, and I quote, 'not cultural'.

I wonder whose culture he was referring to, because his brisk dismissal of my suggestion does nothing but perpetuate a culture of thuggery and silence that offenders use to groom their victims and maintain control to ensure they are not brought to justice. Shouldn't all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women and children have the same access and standards to protection from violence and justice as other Australians? What kind of culture insists that we impinge upon the rights of the individual to freedom from violence and sexual abuse? Because my culture certainly does not do this. The DFAT gender equity framework needs to be applied here, within Australia, throughout all Indigenous affairs programs.

The COAG 2016 National Summit on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children recently launched its third action plan. While I support this document's many practical measures and most of its focus, it fails to deliver for Indigenous Australians. Some of its language is soft on violence and excuses criminal behaviour. It notes that responses to family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must recognise the impacts of traumas resulting from colonisation, racism and social disadvantage as intersecting factors in perpetuating violence.

Yet as Dr Hannah McGlade has contended, any claim that the

violence of men against women and children is solely attributable to the impacts of colonialism unacceptably excuses these criminal behaviours and places an unfair burden upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in particular.

There is another glaring failure of this third action plan. It recommends that cases of violence against Indigenous women and children should be dealt with, and I quote, through ‘activities that provide wraparound, case-managed support for families, and encourage behavioural change without resorting to police or courts’.

How does this divestment of the roles of the police, the courts and allied services respond to the needs of Indigenous victims of criminal violence? Forcing victims to resolve crimes perpetrated against them without going to the police will do nothing but feed the destructive culture of silence that allows criminals to gain power over communities through fear, and further normalise criminal behaviours.

Non-criminal justice responses to the needs of Indigenous victims of violence will, in all likelihood, ingrain an already epidemic culture of non-reporting, and further prevent victims of rape and child abuse from making contact with authorities who are properly trained and empowered to deal with serious offences. This is a very dangerous way to deal with criminal offending, especially for Indigenous victims, and I am shocked and dismayed at this present approach.

On the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council, I am Chair of the Safe Communities Subcommittee. I am concerned that I have submitted advice on community safety that, for reasons unknown, has been excluded from our official records and, while still determined to make a difference, I have found little support within the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council for Indigenous victim’s rights. It is for this reason that I’ve teamed up with Professor Marcia Langton, who has been a great support in navigating this inaction.

When I was appointed as Chair of the Safe Communities Subcommittee about a year-and-a-half ago, I jumped at the chance. I initially received no resources from PM&C, so I asked KPMG to assist, and they provided me with two executives, Liz Forsyth and Martin Shepard, to facilitate women’s and men’s sessions on identifying strategies to reduce Indigenous family violence. The

result of these sessions was the advice we provided to PM&C and the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council. It included a list of recommendations and proposed direction, as well as support for Charlie King's No More campaign, which we proposed should be launched in Parliament House in November last year.

So what happened? Our findings failed to be accepted into the official records of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council and, despite major support from White Ribbon, Our Watch and major sporting codes, our request to launch the No More campaign in Parliament House was initially met with deafening silence. Bill Shorten has recently written to us stating his support for the No More campaign, and we are still waiting for the Prime Minister to respond.

Our government is far too slow and uncoordinated in responding to violence against Indigenous women and children. This is partly due to the many ministerial oversights and departments involved. I suggest that only one senior minister in cabinet should have this responsibility and oversight.

The present failure of Australian governments to allocate ministerial and departmental responsibility to coordinate and integrate policies, funding and programs is preventing progress. There are more than five departments and six ministers who have some policy oversight of Indigenous community safety at the federal level alone.

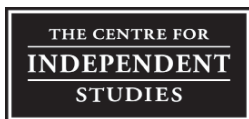
These include the Office for Women, and the Departments of Social Security, Health, Justice, the Attorney General, and Prime Minister and Cabinet. Many of these departments, and some ministers, do not work collaboratively and, in the non-government sector, unhelpful competition for scarce resources further exacerbates our slow progress in dealing with violence against women and children. Most law and order issues are a state-and-territory responsibility, so if the Commonwealth cannot be coordinated and responsive in dealing with violence against women and children at the federal level, it has no hope in influencing other jurisdictions.

Indigenous Australians, and particularly Indigenous women and children, deserve the same rights, and protections to freedom from criminal violence and sexual abuse, as all other Australians no matter who the perpetrators may be and irrespective of cultural background.

If the Australian Government is serious about its attempts to secure a seat on United Nations Human Rights Council, then this issue must be addressed urgently as a matter of national importance, and appropriate measures taken to protect victims from criminals and not deny them access to police, courts and justice. It is only then that we can ever hope to reverse Australia's worsening statistics for Indigenous incarcerations, suicide, and child removals.

As Jacinta, Marcia and I have demonstrated here today, it cannot fall to individuals to fight this campaign alone. Australia as a nation must take responsibility right now for ensuring that our human rights to freedom from criminal violence and sexual abuse are upheld for Indigenous Australians alongside all other Australians.





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Urgent action is needed to address the epidemic of violence in Indigenous communities. Aboriginal women are between 37 and 80 times more likely to experience family violence than non-Indigenous women. For too long, the voices of the victims of domestic violence have been oppressed and silenced.

As part of its ongoing advocacy to address this issue, The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) Indigenous Research Program was pleased to present the voices of three outspoken and fearless Aboriginal women. Professor Marcia Langton AM, Councillor Jacinta Price, and lawyer and businesswoman Josephine Cashman outlined personal experiences with family violence, and the policy and community levers that could rapidly reduce the current high rates. They called for urgent change to address the ongoing problem of violence in Indigenous communities.



Jacinta Price is an elected member of the Alice Springs Council and has grown up in Alice Springs. She is a singer-songwriter and a children's television writer and producer, passionate about improving the lives of Indigenous children, and addressing tough issues such as domestic violence and helping build a unified community.



Professor Marcia Langton AM is an anthropologist and geographer, and Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne. She has produced a large body of knowledge in political and legal anthropology, Indigenous engagement with the minerals industry, and Indigenous culture and art.



Josephine Cashman is a Worimi entrepreneur from New South Wales. She is a lawyer, business woman and social entrepreneur, a member of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council and Chair of its Safe Communities Committee. She also sits on the Board of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. She is also founder of Riverview Global Partners Pty Ltd.

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