



Press Release

National voice for First Peoples must be funded by government

May 11, 2016

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, ANTaR, today expressed dismay that the Indigenous Affairs Minister is refusing to fund National Congress of Australia's First Peoples after the Election.

Andrew Meehan, National Director ANTaR said it would be unacceptable if the Coalition went to the Election with a policy to discontinue funding for a national voice for First Peoples.

Mr Meehan noted that in February the Prime Minister said it was government's job 'to provide an environment that enables Indigenous leaders to develop local solutions', but comments made on radio yesterday by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs indicated that he was intent on stripping away funding from the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples.

"It's time for Mr Turnbull to step in and overrule the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and commit to funding Congress. Anything less would not be consistent with his comments in February," Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan noted that there had been minimal progress on closing the gap, incarceration and violence rates were spiralling out of control, and disadvantage was getting worse across most indicators.

"Government must engage with First Peoples to find better solutions to these issues, and that means properly funding National Congress of Australia's First Peoples so they can participate in national policy development," Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan said that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and front line services are reeling from upheaval and uncertainty created by more than \$500million cut from Indigenous Affairs over the last 3 years, and minimal engagement on the development of the fraught Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

"It's time to live up to the laudable words of the Prime Minister in his Closing the Gap speech in February and engage with and listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – National Congress of Australia's First Peoples should be a key part of that," Mr Meehan said.

ANTaR is the only incorporated non-Indigenous organisation dedicated solely to supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working to educate the wider community, shape public opinion and speak up for justice, rights and respect for Australia's First Peoples