



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Edmund Rice International Limited, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **The Impact of Development Projects on the Rights of Larrakia People in Northern Territory, Australia**

The maltreatment of First Nations Australians continues to be manifested nationally in the exploitation of Indigenous rights and country. Indigenous self-determination is undermined consistently through the promotion of harmful misconceptions of First Nations Australians, demonstrating the ongoing manifestation of colonial racism across Australian socio-political structures. Despite our national commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and reconciliation processes, harmful colonial processes continue to manifest further through the imposition of invasive development projects on traditional Indigenous land.

Larrakia leader Eric Fejo has provided a written testimony against the abuse of Aboriginal heritage and land by the Australian Government, calling for the protection of natural environments of cultural significance:

“I want to thank those people who have supported the Larrakia people and who have supported the protection of Australia’s natural and cultural heritage.

The city of Darwin sits over the traditional country of Larrakia people. Today Larrakia country is under threat by the Federal Government, the Northern Territory Government, and a consortium of private capital.

Against the interests of the Larrakia people, the Federal Government are involved in a housing development on traditional Larrakia land at Lee Point for Defence Housing, and they have partnered with the Northern Territory Government and a private consortium to develop a liquified gas and petrochemical plant at Middle Arm.

They have not recognized or respected Larrakia people, nor have they protected the natural environment and they have not genuinely engaged with Larrakia people over these developments.

Twenty-two years ago, when I was experiencing some tough challenges in my life, my mother wrote some beautiful words encouraging me to fight and not quit because even though the road is hard, success will come if you stick to the fight.

Our mothers provide nourishment, and they nurture, support, and protect us. Our mothers do so much for us. Our strength comes from our mothers.

Larrakia country also provides nourishment, and it nurtures, protects, and gives me strength. The land is like my mother. When things get tough, I take time out to listen to my country. It re-energizes me. It gives me life.

Larrakia country is a living ecosystem because if you listen closely to country - the sound of the wind, the waves of the ocean, the trees, and the animals – you will hear what the country is saying.

If you hear the country, then you will understand that people and the natural environment are all organic, a living, breathing entity all connected. Every form of life has a worth and a place in the ecosystem. Australians must have an allegiance to the land, its ecosystems, and the culture that runs through the land. Our natural and cultural heritage is the essence of who we are as people. If we continue to destroy our heritage, then we are nobody and we achieve nothing.

My mother is no longer with us, but I hear her words in the struggle to protect Larrakia cultural heritage and Larrakia country. It is a hard road. However, I along with all of you, have a great responsibility and obligation to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of country, people and communities.

We must live ecologically responsible and sustainable lives. We must protect the life support systems of the Earth, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage. We must ensure that government and industry prevent the long-term consequences of environmental harm including harm to our culture, health, and wellbeing.

Why are governments and industry not able to protect our cultural and natural heritage? Why does Australia still rely on industrial development that destroys cultural and natural heritage? Why can't we create alternative industries that protect the natural environment, the cultural heritage, and the well-being of people?"

Edmund Rice International and the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Sydney would thus recommend that the Northern Territory government and the Australian Federal government:

1. Support the Larrakia people of the Northern Territory in respecting and protecting their natural and cultural environment and consult and engage with them in any further discussions and decision-making regarding industrial and housing development.
2. That the Federal Government take seriously their commitment to uphold UNDRIP Articles 25 and 26, whereby the Federal Government is required to preserve and protect the territories and resources the indigenous peoples have traditionally owned and occupied and maintained their unique spiritual connection to these lands.
3. That the incapacity of the Australian Government to respect its commitment to UNDRIP demonstrates the urgent need for structural change through the implementation of mechanisms to protect and celebrate the self-determination of the oldest continuing living culture on earth.

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Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Sydney, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.