



NATSILS

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES**

MEDIA RELEASE

20 December 2013

Government cuts support for National Congress

Today the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) express concern at the Australian Government's announcement that it will, in all likelihood, renege on an official \$15 million funding commitment in the 2013 Budget towards the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (Congress).

NATSILS Chairperson, Shane Duffy, said that Congress fulfils a vital role in representing the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"Congress was created in respect of the fundamental right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in decision-making in relation to matters which affect them," Mr Duffy said.

"The Government's announcement that it will be withdrawing support for Congress calls into question whether the Government is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and listening to what they have to say."

Mr Duffy said that the lack of support for Congress, as well as funding cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services announced earlier this week, calls into question Tony Abbott's self-promoted commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"Tony Abbott has repeatedly advertised himself as the Prime Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs," Mr Duffy said.

"Yet to date, the majority of his Government's decisions in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations has been to cut support and effectively silence them".

Mr Duffy said that as a member of Congress, NATSILS will be supporting Congress however it can to continue to represent the rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"Congress must now work towards building a sustainable financial base for the long term," Mr Duffy said.

"Only through true independence from Government can we achieve real self-determination."

Media contact: Rachel O'Brien 0438 748 389 or rachel.obrien@atsils.org.au