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Church group slams neglect of blacks

From DEIRDRE MACKEN

SYDNEY. — Aborigines have been denigrated socially and spiritually by hostile Governments, paternalistic churches, indifferent and powerful bureaucrats and brutal law officers, according to a World Council of Churches report.

The neglect of their needs has caused alcoholism, disease, illiteracy and unemployment, which charitable programmes cannot hope to overcome, the report says.

The report recommends several changes in the treatment of Aborigines by Governments and churches to bring justice to "the hidden people of Australia".

It urges that 1 per cent of all Government jobs be reserved for Aborigines.

The report, entitled 'Justice for Australian Aborigines', will be distributed as a book throughout the world and is the result of a three-week visit by five members of the council.

Details of the report were released at a news conference in Sydney yesterday.

The report will be used to embarrass the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, internationally. Plans are under way to distribute copies to every delegate at next month's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in an attempt to provoke discussion of the Aborigines' plight.

Among the recommendations to Federal and State Governments are the quashing of "racist State legislation"; strengthening health, legal, housing and education facilities; and extending the freeze on mining development in Arnhem Land.

Recommendations for churches include giving land and finance to Aborigines to use as they wish; educating the public; and becoming "politically involved on the side of the Aborigines."

The Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Senator Baume, said in

Canberra that the report showed a bad picture, but one which was a great improvement on that of 10 years ago.

He defended the Government's record in improving Aboriginal health, housing, legal and education services. But he added: "I'd be an idiot if I said there weren't still enormous problems to overcome."

The main aim of the WCC report is to bring international attention to the treatment of Aborigines. The Aboriginal consultant on the project, Mr Gary Foley said: "The Australian public will now have to listen because this report will be distributed around the world and Australia will be judged by what is in it."