



MEDIA RELEASE: ONE YEAR ON FROM THE ROYAL COMMISSION, THE NT YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM REMAINS BROKEN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

16TH NOVEMBER 2018

To mark the anniversary of the release of the Royal Commission into Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory's final report, the Change the Record Coalition, including significant human rights organisations, is calling on the NT Gunner Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility and get children out of harmful youth prisons.

"Everyone wants their children to be safe and supported but the Gunner Government is putting children in danger by reopening Don Dale and continuing business as usual after the Royal Commission called for a 'profound shift from past practice'," Co-Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Cheryl Axleby said. "Tear gassing children is a significant human rights violation and sees the NT Government mark the anniversary of the Royal Commission choosing to subject kids to further trauma and harm" she said.

The Gunner Government [reported on 11th November](#) that children who had been placed in the Darwin Police Watch House were returned to Don Dale following a security incident where tear gas was used against the children in Don Dale.

"There's no time to wait: the NT Government can make changes right now to fix this broken system. It urgently needs to raise the minimum age it locks up children from 10 years old to 14, and fund Indigenous-led programs like Balunu, which will support our kids not to end up in the system in the first place, and to stay out of detention," said Rodney Dillon, Indigenous Rights Adviser with Amnesty International.

"We need to see more action from the NT Government to get children out of prison," said Ms Axleby. "Expediting measures like raising the age of criminal responsibility and appointing a Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People will be a positive step to keep children out of dangerous prisons like Don Dale," she said.

"We've heard that just in the last week tear gas had been deployed near children, that staffing issues and frequent lockdowns have increased tensions, and that children have been held in conditions akin to solitary confinement, despite clear recommendations by the Royal Commission against such actions," said Shahleena Musk, Senior Lawyer with the Human Rights Law Centre. "Punishment and confinement will not achieve the change we want in these kids, but has all the potential to increase tensions and risk. The Royal Commission recommended that the use of tear gas against children should be banned and that behaviour management regimes not be used as punishment," she said.

"Most of the children in Don Dale are on remand, that is having not been found guilty or awaiting information to sentence" said Ms Musk. "For these children every effort should be made to support them in the community, including through mental health supports, bail hostels, education and training programs. It is time for the Gunner Government to show us what progress has been made in this past year in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission aimed at preventing children being funnelled into prison," she said.



For media comment please contact:

For Cheryl Axleby please contact Karly Warner on 0423 610 587

For Rodney Dillon please contact Jenny Stopher on 0423 280 658

For Shahleena Musk please contact Michelle Bennett on 0419 100 519

