



NATSILS
National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

5 June 2020

NATSILS MEDIA RELEASE: NATSILS supports Black Lives Matter rallies across Australia

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) resoundingly supports the Black Lives Matter rallies organised for Australia tomorrow, in solidarity with George Floyd's homicide and to call for an end to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody here.

Today governments in Victoria and New South Wales announced measures to restrict the ability of people to attend the peaceful protests which have been planned. Tonight the New South Wales Supreme Court handed down a ruling that the protest could not go ahead.

"We cannot be silent while police violence is unchecked and continues to kill our people. Upholding freedom of expression and assembly at times like this is critical and we encourage governments to ensure that people attending the peaceful protests are doing so in the safest way possible. We strongly encourage governments to use methods that do not result in the further criminalisation of, or violence to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - including fines," said Nerita Waight, co-chair of NATSILS.

"We recognise there are health risks posed by mass gatherings, Australians have fundamental human rights to freedom of speech, movement and assembly. There are ways that governments can work with communities tomorrow instead of resorting to mass fines or criminal measures - just like they are doing for the re-opening of the National Rugby League announced today."

"We are of the view that protest organisers have made a significant effort to warn protestors about the health risks and the precautions to take if they are attending. We urge people to make their own assessment whether to attend and should they choose to attend to be safe, to take strict precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 including social distancing and the measures suggested by medical authorities."

During this global health crisis we have seen some human rights restricted to reduce the spread of the virus, but measures must be proportionate, non-discriminatory and strictly necessary and directed towards a legitimate cause.

"Addressing systemic racism in this country is legitimate and necessary, especially during such a historical moment of reckoning where there is global outrage to address how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to die at the hands of police and correction officers."

“Policy brutality and racism is a global issue. There have been 432 black deaths in custody in Australia since the Royal Commission almost 30 years ago. There has not been a single conviction. The sentiments expressed during the last week show that the Australian community are standing in solidarity with Black America, recognising the injustices that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face and want to see national leadership so that there are no more black deaths in custody. We need that leadership now.”

END OF RELEASE

Media contact: Sonia Sofat, 0407 780 643