

MEDIA STATEMENT
Thursday 27th November 2014

Leading Aboriginal and rights organisations say Social Justice Commissioner's recommendations must be actioned

A coalition of national Aboriginal, human rights and campaign organisations from across Australia have today welcomed the release of the 2014 Social Justice Report, and called on governments around the country to implement the recommendations. The broad based coalition is working together to develop new approaches to tackle the unacceptable rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment and create safer communities in a more coordinated way.

Shane Duffy, Chairperson of NATSILS, said that the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system is now at epidemic levels.

"Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Australians, and our youth are around 24 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people," Mr Duffy said.

"The Commissioner's recommendations to address this growing social crisis and create safer communities through the implementation of justice targets and a justice reinvestment approach should be accepted and actioned as a matter of priority."

Kirstie Parker, Co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, said that the report was right to include a focus on incarceration issues given the clear and mounting evidence of a national crisis for our Peoples. She said that a Productivity Commission Report released just last week showed that incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been increasing dramatically.

"The latest evidence shows a continuing worsening of justice outcomes. We've seen the adult imprisonment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples increase by 57% between 2000 and 2013. The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women being imprisoned has soared, increasing by 73.7% since 2000."

The Social Justice Commissioner's recommendation for the development of COAG Closing the Gap justice targets would provide a much needed policy focus in the justice space.

"Any new approach to addressing over-imprisonment must be grounded in the principles of community-control and self-determination, with communities themselves developing and implementing policies and programs for change. The implementation of a justice reinvestment approach would provide a circuit breaker to skyrocketing incarceration rates," said Ms Parker.

The coalition of organisations called on government to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to implement the recommendations in the report.

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The coalition includes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Gooda
- Amnesty International Australia (AIA)
- Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
- Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD)
- Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association (AIDA)
- ANTaR
- Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)
- First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)
- Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC)
- Law Council of Australia
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS)
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
- National Congress of Australia's First Peoples
- National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVLPS) Forum
- National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC)
- Oxfam Australia
- Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
- Sisters Inside