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MEDIA RELEASE: Australian Government to face scrutiny at the United Nations for an inexcusable rate of locking up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Today the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) will join Australia's NGO delegation at the United Nations for the review of Australia by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD Committee) to ensure that Australian Governments are held accountable for locking up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a rate of 13 times higher than non-Indigenous people.

"The review of Australia by the CERD Committee provides a unique opportunity for our people, our communities and our community controlled organisations to have the United Nations scrutinise Australia's international human rights obligations and actions to eliminate racial discrimination", said NATSILS Co-Chair Wayne Muir.

Alongside Australia's NGO delegation, NATSILS will be briefing the CERD Committee on Australia's shameful record regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights. NATSILS will highlight before the CERD Committee a number of key recommendations articulated in the [Joint NGO Coalition Shadow Report](#), co-ordinated in partnership with the Human Rights Law Centre, Refugee Council of Australia and Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia.

"We call on the Australian Government to show national leadership and implement the recommendations contained within the Joint NGO Coalition Shadow Report, endorsed by over 50 organisations, which highlight the urgent need for action in the prevention and elimination of racial discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people", said Mr Muir.

Earlier this year the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous people, Ms Vicki Tauli-Corpus, noted in her final [Report](#) that *'[the] current claim by the [Australian] Government that matters relating to incarceration remain the sole prerogative of states is untenable in the severe and worsens the impact of the national detention crisis on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Special Rapporteur underlines that it is the responsibility of the federal Government to ensure compliance with international human rights obligations'*.

"The Australian Government is responsible for ensuring that its domestic legislation is compliant with CERD. All Australian Governments could immediately repeal laws that disproportionately criminalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including imprisonment for unpaid fines and mandatory sentencing regimes that negligently fail to address underlying factors of disadvantage, and which have resulted in a plague of criminalisation of our children, men and women right around the country", said Mr Muir.

NATSILS will also be emphasising before the CERD Committee how an increase in resourcing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) can work to address the vast unmet legal needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as identified in numerous national Reports and Inquiries that Governments have ignored.

"We're calling for significant long term increases in resourcing of our ATSILS to ensure our Indigenous children, men and women can access culturally competent legal assistance services that support fairer outcomes", concluded Mr Muir.

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