

Friday 16th December 2016

Extraordinary systemic and individual failure at the heart of Ms Dhu tragedy

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, ANTaR, today called for immediate action to address the systemic and individual failures in the justice system, in light of the Ms Dhu Coronial Inquest findings.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan, said he was deeply disturbed by the video footage showing the inhumane treatment of Ms Dhu, and that the findings of the Inquiry demonstrate that urgent action is required to prevent such cases occurring again.

"It is beyond all comprehension that Ms Dhu, a victim of family violence needing assistance was imprisoned for unpaid fines, treated in a manner in custody that the Coroner herself described as 'inhumane', and was deemed medically fit on multiple occasions by the hospital to be held in custody."

"A young woman is now dead because of those complete failures on the part of the system, and on the part of individuals who could have kept her alive."

"The system must be changed, and those responsible should be prosecuted," he said.

"The Inquest findings highlight the desperate need for better responses to victims of family violence, including the provision of appropriate support services. There is also need to address poor police responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence," he said.

Mr Meehan noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can expect to be hospitalised as a result of family violence at 34 times the rate of other women, and they are also the fastest growing prison population in the country.

"It is well past time that governments around the country looked at the interconnections between incarceration and family violence."

"The focus needs to shift to early intervention, prevention and diversion, and no-one should ever be locked up for unpaid fines," he said.

He also called for compulsory custody notification services to be introduced across the country, and a serious address to systemic racism within the health system, police, and corrective services.

"We've got serious racism experienced by First Peoples as part of everyday life – it can't go on unchecked, and it's certainly not time to wind back protections against racial discrimination," he said.

He said that Federal, State and Territory governments need to listen to the solutions that Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Legal Services, the Change the Record Campaign and many others have been putting forward for years.

"Governments across the country should start by introducing justice targets through COAG on both incarceration and family violence to start driving systemic change and seriously grapple with these issues," he said.

Mr Meehan acknowledged and praised the extraordinary courage and stoicism of the family of Ms Dhu in demanding the release of the CCTV footage and their unwavering fight for justice.

ANTaR is a foundational member of the Change the Record Campaign and is dedicated solely to supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working to educate the wider community, shape public opinion, and speak up for justice, rights and respect for Australia's First Peoples.

Media contact: ANTaR National Director, Mr Andrew Meehan – 0434 920 906