

MEDIA RELEASE



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As a member of UN Human Rights Council Australia must address 'woeful' record on First Peoples

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights ANTaR, has today called on the Australian Government to take seriously its role on the UN Human Rights Council by addressing serious human rights concerns in Australia, following its election to the Council last night.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that Australia's election to the UN body was an opportunity to not only contribute to addressing human rights abuses around the globe, but to fix those at home.

Mr Meehan noted that it was only a few months ago that the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples said,

"The extraordinarily high rate of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, including women and children, is a major human rights concern."

In the same report, the Special Rapporteur found the numerous reports on the prevalence of racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to be "deeply disturbing" and referred to the government's progress in relation to closing the disadvantage gaps experienced by First Peoples as "woefully inadequate."

"There are serious human rights concerns occurring under the Australian Government's nose as a result of government failure to engage with and listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Mr Meehan said.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are increasingly frustrated by the failure of successive Australian Governments to close the gap and address the disproportionate numbers of First Peoples in custody. International UN complaint processes are one of the few remedies available to address these injustices in a country without a bill of rights."

Mr Meehan said that the Australian Government should be aware that the Human Rights Committee has a right to investigate complaints of consistent patterns of human rights violations. This could include the living conditions in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or the systemic discrimination against which occurs within the criminal justice system.

“The Australian Government cannot be taken seriously as a member of the UN Human Rights Council if it doesn’t address these concerns, working in partnership with First Peoples.”

Mr Meehan also noted that in the eight years since Australia signed onto the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples, there had been no attempt to implement it.

ANTaR is the only non-Indigenous organisation 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.