Press Release
Monday 14 December, 2015

COAG must now set targets to reduce incarceration and violence experienced by First Peoples

Following the meeting of the Council of Australian Governments on Friday, national advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights – ANTaR, today expressed frustration at the absence of any focus on lowering rates of violence and incarceration experienced by First Peoples.

National Director of ANTaR Andrew Meehan said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for an agreement to be forged at COAG on family violence and incarceration for a long time. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are hospitalised at 34 times the rate of non-Indigenous women as a result of family violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are locked up at 13 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians.

"These two issues constitute a far-reaching generational crisis requiring national leadership through the COAG process," he said.

“COAG must deliver on their resolve from the April COAG meeting of this year to reduce contact by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the criminal justice system both as offenders and victims.

“To date, we’ve heard nothing by way of follow up on that, so Friday's meeting was a great disappointment in that regard,” Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan welcomed the announcement of a national summit on family violence in 2016, but called on government to ensure that the voices of Aboriginal women, who are the most affected, are central to the discussion.

This must involve community-controlled organisations that provide frontline services to victim/survivors, such as Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, actively participating in the forum. ANTaR also welcomed the new Closing the Gap Target on early childhood education, noting that genuine community engagement and community driven solutions along with adequate resourcing would be essential in reaching this target.

Mr Meehan said “Targets are critical to providing direction, clarity and a means to measure how we are tracking against agreed outcomes. COAG should now apply the same rationale to incarceration and family violence.”

ANTaR is the only incorporated 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.