

MEDIA RELEASE



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Broad support for Call to Action to reduce Indigenous imprisonment

A wide range of community organisations have endorsed a Call to Action aimed at dramatically reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our jails.

The Joint Call to Action was released today to mark 20 years since the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was handed to the Governor General. It is endorsed by a range of Aboriginal and community legal services and human rights organisations.

Ms Jacqueline Phillips, ANTaR National Director, says that it is unacceptable that imprisonment rates have continued to increase in the 20 years since the Royal Commission reported. Since 1989, the imprisonment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has increased twelve times faster than the rate for the rest of the community.

“ANTaR believes we must use the current focus on imprisonment rates to get this issue on the national agenda. Governments at all levels must commit to concerted action in cooperation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups at community level who are working for change,” Ms Phillips said.

“We have commended governments for their commitment to targets to close the gap in health, education and employment.

“Imprisonment rates impact on all of these other issues, but there are no targets to reduce these rates and the efforts of governments in this area are piecemeal at best. **The fact that this is a difficult issue is no excuse for continuing to leave it in the ‘too-hard-basket’.**”

Ms Phillips is launching ANTaR’s National Campaign to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison at a Public March in Perth on Friday 15 April. Approximately one in every sixteen Aboriginal males in Western Australia is in prison, the worst rate in the country.

The Call to Action can be accessed at ANTaR’s website at:

http://www.antar.org.au/issues_and_campaigns/reducing_indigenous_incarceration

It will form the basis of a continuing national campaign involving a wide range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community organisations working at both local and national levels.

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ANTaR relies on the support of generous donations to continue its work supporting the rights and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Organisations who have endorsed the National Call to Action to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system (as at 15 April, 2011):

**Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM)
Aboriginal Legal Service (WA)
Amnesty International Australia
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR)
Community Legal Centres NSW
Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA
Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre
Human Rights Alliance
Human Rights Law Centre
Indigenous Policy and Dialogue Research Unit
Indigenous Social Justice Association
Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning Research Unit
National Association for Community Legal Centres (NACLC)
National Police Accountability Network of NACLC
National Welfare Rights Network
Northern Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA)
Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC)**

Key components of the National Call to Action include:

- That Federal, State and Territory governments adopt a National Plan at COAG level with targets for reducing Indigenous imprisonment rates;
- That governments commit to a Justice Reinvestment approach. Justice Reinvestment involves diverting some of the funds spent on imprisonment into communities with a high concentration of offenders to fund initiatives that will reduce rates of offending. Fourteen states in the USA are currently exploring or implementing Justice Reinvestment approaches.
- That governments improve police accountability and standards in all places of detention through the introduction of independent investigations of police conduct and inspections of all places of detention.