

MEDIA RELEASE



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Practical action needed now to address ‘national shame’ of Aboriginal imprisonment

Delivering the 25th Lionel Murphy lecture last night, the Attorney-General Robert McClelland acknowledged that over-imprisonment causes more crime than it prevents and affirmed the need for all governments to work together to address the social causes of crime .

“The statistics are stark and the evidence about what works to break the cycle is compelling. There is no excuse for governments to delay action to address the social causes of over-imprisonment in Aboriginal communities,” said Jacqueline Phillips, ANTaR National Director.

“ANTaR welcomes the Attorney-General’s recognition that ‘tough on crime’ approaches may do more harm than good. It’s now time for practical action to right the ‘enduring wrong’ of Aboriginal over-imprisonment.”

“We are encouraged by Mr McClelland’s interest in shifting policy towards a justice reinvestment approach. We now call on all governments to work together in developing a framework to divert resources from prisons to disadvantaged communities. Overseas experience demonstrates that this is the most effective way to break the cycle.”

“ANTaR calls Federal, state and territory leaders to ensure that Aboriginal imprisonment is a top priority at COAG’s next meeting.”

“The agreement of justice targets to reduce the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be a vital first step in coordinating national action towards a common goal.”

“Justice targets and a justice reinvestment action plan to reduce imprisonment are currently the missing pieces in the Closing the Gap strategy.”

“We also urge the Attorneys-General to take action within the justice system to reduce the remand population, reduce re-offending through effective rehabilitation programs and find alternative responses to minor offences.”

As the Attorney-General noted in his lecture last night, “mindless incarceration of people is an incredibly expensive way to deal with minor offences.”

Imprisonment rates are now worse than they were at the time of the Royal Commission report 20 years ago, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 14 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous Australians.

Media contact:

ANTaR National Director - Jacqueline Phillips 0423 773 395