

## Media Release



10 November 2015

### **UN Review makes clear that it's time Australia got serious about reducing First Peoples' incarceration**

ANTaR, national advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, today called on government to demonstrate its commitment to First Peoples' human rights by acting on the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review.

Australia, appearing before the Human Rights Council on 9<sup>th</sup> November for its Universal Periodic Review (UPR), was questioned about its human rights record by over 100 countries. Of particular focus was its record in relation to First Peoples, with many countries raising concerns about the high rates of incarceration experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that it wasn't good enough for Australia to provide motherhood statements about getting kids to school, adults to work, and economic development without a specific national focus to address high rates of incarceration and violence experienced by First Peoples.

Mr Meehan said "The ongoing and well known crisis of over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of the most serious rights issues facing the nation at the moment, and it's long overdue that a national approach to this issue was forged."

"Not only are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being locked up at around 13 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians, it's getting worse, with an 88% increase in the last 10 years," he said.

"Report after report after report highlights the crisis that is leaving a generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people behind. The frightening reality is that we're going backwards on this as a nation.

"It's time for governments to act, and start working with First Peoples to address incarceration as well as the high rates of violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Mr Meehan said.

ANTaR and UNSW Law School are holding a Forum - '*Changing the record on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration*', tonight to look at the issue and what needs to be done to turn around the skyrocketing incarceration rates.

The Forum will look at early intervention, prevention and diversion, as well as justice reinvestment, as approaches that need more support from government to break the cycle.

Professor Chris Cunneen, conjoint professor of criminology in the Faculty of Law of the University of New South Wales and Forum panellist said that “Justice Reinvestment is a process of reducing imprisonment levels and redirecting funding towards community development. It provides a way out of the current impasse.”

Forum speaker, Senior Judge of the Drug Court, Judge Dive said that some things are just common sense – such as the Drug Court, which looks at the root causes of crime.

“By helping addicted offenders make real changes in their lives, they again become contributing members of our society,” Judge Dive said.

Keenan Mundine, Forum speaker and Youth Worker with the Kool Kids program at Youth and Community Services organisation, Weave said "The opportunity I got that day in court with his honour Judge Dive has changed my life - I've had the opportunity to take a different path and through that opportunity I was able to learn new skills and live my life differently. Now I am working with Weave, studying, playing football, reconnecting with my culture, family and community and starting my own family.”

Media Contact ANTaR: Jane Powles

Event: Changing the Record on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Incarceration  
Date: Tuesday Nov 10  
Time: 6.00pm - 6.30pm  
Venue: G23 UNSW Law School

*ANTaR is a member of the Change the Record Campaign and 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.*

[www.antar.org.au](http://www.antar.org.au)

The *Change the Record Campaign* has two overarching goals: Close the gap in rates of imprisonment by 2040; and Cut the disproportionate rates of violence to at least close the gap by 2040 with priority strategies for women and children.

[www.changetherecord.org](http://www.changetherecord.org)