

# Press Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Horrific abuse of young people in Northern Territory must lead to real change**

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, ANTaR today called for the sacking of Northern Territory Minister for Corrective Services, Justice, Families and Children, John Elferink following harrowing footage of abuse of young people in detention at Don Dale youth detention centre.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that the treatment of young people in the program, almost all of whom were Aboriginal, was just sickening, and the perpetrators and those in charge of the justice system must be held to account.

“ANTaR has been campaigning for governments to do something about the incarceration rates of First Peoples for a number of years, to take a different approach to the mindless ‘tough on crime’ mantra, and to put in safeguards in place for those in custody,” he said.

“This footage shows that the NT Government just hasn’t listened, and that things have sunk to a new low in this country. Calls by Aboriginal people and organisations, and supporters over decades cannot continue to be ignored.”

Mr Meehan noted that around 90% of young people incarcerated in the NT are Aboriginal, and across the nation Aboriginal young people are incarcerated at 26 times the rate of non-Indigenous young people.

“If not this program, what will it take for governments to look at new approaches that prevent kids from going to jail in the first place?”

“What was exposed last night, and the crisis of incarceration of First Peoples cannot be the sort of country that we want to live in, nor accept,” he said.

Mr Meehan said the Prime Minister’s announcement of a Royal Commission into Juvenile Mistreatment in the Northern Territory was a start, but the terms of reference will be critical.

He noted that the country had a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody that made 339 recommendations 25 years ago. Its major finding was that the high rates of death in custody was a result of the over-incarceration of Aboriginal people.

“25 years ago, the rate of incarceration of First Peoples was seven times that of non-Indigenous people, today it’s 13 times, and for Aboriginal young people it’s 26 times.”

The Royal Commission should absolutely focus clearly on the Don Dale abuse to bring the perpetrators to justice, and document the system failings and incidences of abuse in the NT, and it should report back quickly. There should also be an inquiry into the over-incarceration of Aboriginal young people across the country, which could be a longer time frame.

“Those directly responsible for the abuse highlighted last night must be held to account. Those responsible for the system that allowed it to happen must also be held to account, and those that continue to pursue ‘tough on crime’ approaches that lock young people up without addressing the root causes of offending, must start to listen to the alternatives,” Mr Meehan said.

He noted that the Change the Record Campaign had developed a Blueprint for Change on incarceration which had to date received minimal attention from the Federal Government.

“The time for national leadership of the crisis rates of incarceration of First Peoples is now. The Prime Minister must make this a priority,” he said.

## About

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. ANTaR is a member of the Change the Record campaign, people can take the Change the Record pledge to show their support for addressing the incarceration crisis of First Peoples - <https://antar.org.au/webform/change-record-pledge>