

## Media Release

Date: Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015

### Australia's Human Rights Review: Time to Change the Record

In the early hours of Tuesday morning (local time) Australia's human rights record will be examined before the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva as part of its second "Universal Periodic Review" (UPR). As the world turns its attention to Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd urges the Australian government to strengthen its commitment and action to address the nation's unacceptable record of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment.

ATSILS CEO, Shane Duffy said, "First Nations Australians are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the country. Currently our people are being imprisoned at around 13 times the rate of non Indigenous Australians and year after year the gap continues to widen. It reached crisis point long ago and remains one of the biggest human rights challenges facing the country."

Since Australia's last UPR in 2011, the number of imprisoned disadvantaged people has increased, our prisons are grappling with a record population of inmates and the general conditions in prisons around Australia have deteriorated. Mr. Duffy said, "Of particular concern is the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people caught up in the system on remand and the number of people with mental illness and cognitive impairments left languishing in jails due to lack of support services in communities."

Custody and crime statistics released in study after study continue to paint a bleak picture that indicates we are going backwards in attempts to address the factors that lead to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in prison. Just last week a University of NSW report found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners had their first contact with police 3.4 years earlier than non-Indigenous inmates and were 2.4 times more likely to have spent time in juvenile justice custody than non-Indigenous inmates. Of the state's 2700 prisoners with a known mental illness or cognitive impairment 25% were Indigenous despite making up only 3% of the total state's population. (Full Report: <https://www.mhdcd.unsw.edu.au>)

Faced with a continual broken record of damning statistics, Mr. Duffy said the UPR presents an important opportunity for the government to show leadership and charter a course of positive change. "It is time to get tough on the root causes of crime and change the record. We join a large coalition of over 200 NGOs calling for the implementation of holistic justice reinvestment strategies and justice targets to address the underlying causes of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system. To be effective these strategies need to be culturally responsive and locally designed to meet the specific needs of diverse communities. As such it is critical that these strategies are implemented in full partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, services and their representatives."

Australia's review will take place on Monday afternoon in Geneva, approximately 12am to 4am Tuesday 10 November (AEST). Australia's appearance can be viewed live via [webcast](#) or followed on Twitter using the hashtag #AusUPR.

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