

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

MEDIA RELEASE

Hard-line approach is failing our kids, and the community

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Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) calls on the NT Government to reconsider its poorly thought out, hard line approach to young offenders at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre.

“APO NT is deeply concerned about yet another ‘crackdown’ against kids in detention”, said APO NT Spokesperson, Mark O’Reilly.

“We are also alarmed at the NT Government proposal to lock up 11, 12 and 13 year olds found on Darwin’s streets at night.

“The evidence is clear that locking young people up only increases their risk of further incarceration. Locking young people up who have not committed any offences will only reduce their trust in police and law enforcement authorities.

“98% of the children in detention in the Northern Territory are Aboriginal. These children are the product of a cycle of incarceration, which is devastating our families and communities.

“We hold real and serious concerns for the mental, physical and emotional well-being of our Aboriginal children in detention. Focussing on these issues is paramount, if we wish to break the cycle of offending and not further traumatise children”, Mr O’Reilly said.

Her Honour Ms Armitage SM made comment on 7 January 2015 that the environment at the Berrimah Detention Centre at that time was one where there are limited programs, no therapeutic interventions and the approach is principally one of containment, rather than giving sufficient weight to rehabilitation.

“APO NT calls for an end to hard lined punitive approaches in youth justice. These approaches have been tried time and again by the NT Government but it is not reducing crime or making our community safer.

“Children should be detained in an age-appropriate way, and not like adults.

APO NT believes that culturally sensitive therapeutic programs are urgently needed. Cultural connection with Elders, culture and community is pivotal to addressing the emotional and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal youth in detention. This is not happening in Berrimah.

“We believe that programs should be re-directed to engaging children with their culture,’ Mr O’Reilly said.

Amnesty International yesterday released an important report documenting the chronic over-representation of Aboriginal young people in detention. Amnesty found that Indigenous 10-17 year olds are 24 times more likely to be in detention. The report recommends allowing “inspections of youth detention facilities to ensure standards are being met” and declaring any laws that “treat persons below the age of 12 as criminally responsible” invalid.

APO NT calls on the NT Government to listen to the evidence in dealing with young offending, and urgently engage with youth services providers to seek appropriate solutions. Punitive approaches don’t make the community safer. Detention facilities need to be secure, but they must also be health-based and culturally informed.

“The community is not served by brutalising already damaged young people”, Mr O’Reilly concluded.

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