

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Threat of removal of ‘rock throwing’ children into care is punitive and unjustified – APO NT

17th April 2015

The Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) are dismayed at the Northern Territory Government’s threat to Aboriginal parents of rock-throwing youths that their children may be removed and put into care.

In what appears a punitive response, Minister Elferink has directed his department to abandon the principle that taking children into care should be a last resort and that the government should be prepared to work with parents.

“Placing children into care, is never a justified punishment”, said APO NT spokesperson and CEO of NAAJA, Priscilla Collins.

“Such action must remain a last resort after alternative responses have been carefully worked through.

“Removal of children can have devastating impacts on both the child and the family.

The current rate of removal of Aboriginal children from their families is higher than at any other time in the NT’s history. In 2014, the Children’s Commissioner reported that there were 923 children in out of home care.¹ 86% of the children in care were Aboriginal.

“The proposed response reveals a government that is too ready to place all blame on Aboriginal parents but take no responsibility for its own failures in Aboriginal policy.

“As has already been reported, a number of the children involved are already in care under the department.

“APO NT strongly urges the Chief Minister and Minister Elferink to use the current situation as an opportunity to work with all stakeholders to achieve positive solutions to the current issues”, Ms Collins concluded.

Some of the actions that the NT Government could consider include:

- Investment in early intervention and prevention programs in the NT in accordance with the *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children*.
- Allocation of increased resources to youth services to provide youth with meaningful recreation alternatives.
- Seeking a partnership between mainstream and Aboriginal youth services.
- Ensuring government agencies take a coordinated approach in working with children, and work in partnership with youth services and Aboriginal families.

Media inquiries: 0427 045 665

¹ Office of the Children’s Commissioner Northern Territory Annual Report 2013-2014, p35.