

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA RELEASE

Report Highlights Shocking Treatment of Kids in Detention and Need for Urgent Action

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APO NT today expressed alarm at the critical state of Youth Detention in the Northern Territory following a damning report by the Children's Commissioner into the services provided by the Department of Correctional Services ("DCS") and the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre.

The report focuses on the actions and responses by the DCS and Don Dale staff involved in incidents in August 2014 which lead to the tear gassing of six youth detainees.

"This report demonstrates that the punitive approach to Juvenile Justice is not working", said APO NT spokesperson John Paterson.

The report paints a disturbing picture. It is obvious that staff had been poorly trained for dealing with vulnerable children, lacked de-escalation skills, and that DCS failed to follow legislative requirements to appropriately deal with children in their care.

"The Children's Commissioner's report details that these six young people were housed in appalling conditions, including 5 consecutive days in isolation for 23 hours a day in a cell with no fans, air-conditioning, running water, scarce natural light and no natural air ventilation.

"These kids were held in solitary confinement for far longer than the permitted maximum of 72 hours at a time."

Following the release of the Children's Commissioner's report, further allegations of conditions at Don Dale have come to light. This includes staff encouraging boys to fight in exchange for junk food, daring a child to eat bird faeces in exchange for soft drink, and the additional humiliation of this being recorded and posted on social media.

"Evidence shows that exposing children in detention to solitary confinement, abuse and degrading treatment damages the mental health and wellbeing of these children.

"We need the Government to show strong leadership and take immediate action to ensure no child is subjected to this degrading and inhumane treatment again.

"We note the urgent request to the UN Special Rapporteur to investigate conditions in Don Dale. This is an ongoing human rights catastrophe and the NT Government must commit to implementing

the Children's Commissioner's recommendations in full. It cannot be ignored that 98% of children in detention in the NT are Aboriginal.

"The NT community has now lost confidence in DCS to administer youth justice. This report must be the catalyst to bringing the focus back to rehabilitation, not brutalisation".

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