

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

MEDIA RELEASE

High imprisonment rate is devastating Aboriginal families and communities:

We need a smarter and fairer criminal justice system

5 December 2014

Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory,¹ have today called on governments to act on the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

“The recent Productivity Commission’s, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report*² shows that we cannot stand by and watch this happen any longer”, said APONT spokesperson Priscilla Collins.

The NT has the highest imprisonment rate in Australia, more than 4.5 times higher than the national average. Over the last decade, our imprisonment rate has grown by about 60%, and the NT government predicts that it will keep growing at an enormous social and financial cost to taxpayers.

“This is a national crisis, and nowhere is the statistics worse than in the NT.”

“We’re not just locking up men. The number of women in our prisons has almost doubled in the last three years. Our youth justice system is broken, children are being remanded because of the lack of non-custodial alternatives”, Ms Collins said.

“Our prisons are overwhelmed with 85% percent of prisoners at June this year were Aboriginal men, women and children. .

“As the recent report stated, the high rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people ‘has a heavy social and economic impact’. It takes loved ones away from their families for extended periods.

The cycle of incarceration remains devastating for our families and communities. It requires a change. “

“Mandatory sentencing, the re-criminalisation of alcoholism through Alcohol Protection Orders, tougher bail laws and tougher penalties for all kinds of offences, results in more people going to prison for short sentences—but these current laws fail to make our communities safe.

¹ Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory is an alliance of the Central Land Council (CLC), Northern Land Council (NLC), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS) and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT (AMSANT).

² *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2014*, <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage>

Disturbingly, the government is now also introducing paperless arrests, which will see Aboriginal people being held without charge in police custody.

“We urge governments to move away from a punitive, short ‘fix’ to law and order issues, and instead focus on putting money into therapeutic programs and services that will help our communities grow stronger, and avoid the criminal justice system. We need a smarter and fairer investment in strategies that work to reduce crime. Governments should commit to a justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice issues.

“APO NT calls on governments to move away from their reliance on prisons, and to instead invest properly in health, social, culturally appropriate and education services. Governments must stop locking up our people and look for long-term solutions”.

“APONT supports calls from the Social Justice Commissioner, Law Council of Australia and National Justice Coalition for the implementation of justice targets to address the national emergency of Aboriginal over-incarceration across Australia, but especially in the NT”, Ms Collins concluded.

For further information/ Media inquiries: Brionee Noonan on 0424727151 or via email brionee.noonan@amsant.org.au