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MEDIA RELEASE

Closing the Gap on our terms

Today the National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) joining with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies welcomed the Prime Minister's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through their representative organisations, which can occur when we are recognised as truly equal partners.

With four of the seven Closing the Gap targets expiring in 2018 and only two of the remaining targets on track, a change in the relationship between Governments and our Peoples is long overdue.

"We must be the architects of policies that affect our lives and the partnership must recognise our right to self-determine if the quality of life for our peoples is to be improved over the next decade.", said Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

The decision of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) at the end of last year, led by the Prime Minister, to agree a formal partnership with us on Closing the Gap is an historic milestone.

"The test for the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Government will be how it demonstrates leadership to ensure greater accountability from COAG.", added Ms Axleby.

A Coalition of almost 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies from across the nation has formed, providing legitimate community-controlled representation, to be signatories to the formal partnership arrangements on a refreshed Closing the Gap framework.

Following the negotiation of the partnership agreement, we must look to the critical detail of the Closing the Gap framework.

"The Commonwealth Government has never had a deadline for ending the over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - this is why we need a national justice target to make progress to end this human rights injustice," said Ms Axleby.

"Solutions to end over-imprisonment must be developed holistically alongside other areas of disadvantage in the Closing the Gap strategy - health, education, employment - in order to create real

change for future generations. In addition, family violence, child protection, disability and housing targets must be added.”

“Together we must lead this critical national work to address the ongoing legacy of colonisation, to heal our nation.”, Ms Axleby concluded.

END OF RELEASE

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