

MEDIA RELEASE
NT Youth Detention Must be Urgently Addressed

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) has today called for urgent steps to be taken to address the issues raised in the NT Children's Commissioner's alarming report into incidents at the Don Dale Youth Detention in August 2014.

The Report provides indisputable evidence of a system that has failed and catalogues numerous breaches of the Youth Justice Act. It shows that

- children were tear-gassed when no meaningful attempt had been made to negotiate a peaceful outcome without the use of force;
- solitary confinement was used in breach of the Youth Justice Act;
- the conditions in which children were held were inhumane;
- hoods and handcuffs were used on children indiscriminately;
- the public were misled at the time about what happened.

One of the youth justice officers interviewed for the report said he didn't blame the kids for "going off" – he would have done so if he had been treated like they had and was "surprised it didn't happen sooner".

NATSILS is extremely concerned that the NT Government has not made a commitment to implement the findings of the Children's Commissioner's report. Furthermore, there have been no assurances that criminal investigations or disciplinary proceedings would be taken against staff who have acted unlawfully or inappropriately.

"The Minister for Corrections and Attorney-General, John Elferink said on 23 September 2015 that he will be 'investigating' the Children's Commissioner's report - but we have heard nothing of a timeframe of when this will happen", said NATSILS Chair, Shane Duffy.

"This is simply not good enough. In any other part of Australia or the world, this lacklustre response would simply not be tolerated."

"The brutality exposed in this report is shocking. We call on the NT Government to immediately respond to the Children's Commissioner's report and commit to implementing each and every one of the recommendations" said Mr Duffy.

"The community has lost confidence in the youth detention system. It is simply not working. We can't keep going down this same track. Children in detention are amongst the most vulnerable kids in our community. The evidence shows that they need therapeutic programs and the support of fully trained, professional staff if we are serious about their rehabilitation."

"It is time that youth justice was separated from adult correctional services so that young people get the specialist treatment they need to turn their lives around" Mr Duffy said.

NATSILS also calls for the NT Government to honour its election commitment to establish an Independent Custodial Inspector to ensure that basic standards are met in youth detention.

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