



# NATSILS

National Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

**For Immediate Release**

**21 January 2022**

## **NATSILS Media Release: One year since United Nations slams Australia's treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Universal Periodic Review**

This week marks one year since United Nations members criticised and questioned the Australian Government's human rights record against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during a [Universal Periodic Review](#), with Australia overwhelmingly called on to raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years.

Despite more than 30 UN member states recommending that the age be raised, and 19 countries calling specifically for a minimum age of at least 14 years old, Australia's age of criminal responsibility remains just 10 years of age in each state and territory.

Our children make up a staggering 65% of the kids in the criminal legal system; close to 100% in some jurisdictions. Locking kids up in prison causes lifelong damage to their physical and mental development, meaning they are more likely to get stuck in the quicksand of the legal system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rates of incarceration and deaths in custody were also raised by United Nations members, and yet we have devastatingly seen 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody in the last year.

While many countries commended Australia's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), as of yesterday Australia has reached the deadline for OPCAT and governments have yet again stalled on urgent action needed to put an end to the abuse, torture and physical restraint that affects our people and contributes to the national crisis of Aboriginal deaths in custody.

*"One year has passed since Australia's Universal Periodic Review and Governments are still locking up 10-year-old children and sitting back as our people die in custody. The Universal Periodic Review was a critical opportunity for the Australian Government to commit to the recommendations of UN Member states to ending the over-incarceration and deaths in custody of our people, including raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 and implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 30 years on from it being handed down."* - **Priscilla Atkins, NATSILS Co-Chair**

-----END OF RELEASE-----

Media Contact: Lucy Brown, 0435 866 462, [lbrown@vals.org.au](mailto:lbrown@vals.org.au)