

MEDIA RELEASE – Thursday 27th October 2016

Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment must focus on solutions

A major national inquiry into the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must focus on identifying tangible solutions that address the underlying causes of imprisonment, says the Change the Record (CTR) Coalition. In welcoming today's announcement of an Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) inquiry into the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the coalition of peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, human rights and legal organisations has said it is essential that the inquiry focus on practical measures that invest in and strengthen communities.

CTR Co-Chair Shane Duffy said, "For a long time we have been calling for the Federal Government to take a leadership role on these issues, and so we welcome the Turnbull Government beginning to step up to the plate".

"This year marks 25 years since the landmark Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), but our people continue to experience imprisonment and violence at crisis rates. The new ALRC inquiry offers an important opportunity to shine a comprehensive light on these issues at a national level, and identify tangible actions for all levels of government" said Mr Duffy.

At the time the RCIADIC report was handed down Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were seven times more likely to be in prison, now in 2016 that figure has risen to 13 times. At the same time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are experiencing high rates of violence, being 34 times more likely to be hospitalised for family violence related assault.

"We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment rates, and experience of violence, are strongly linked to social and economic disadvantage and so the inquiry must include a focus on early intervention, prevention and diversion programs" said Mr Duffy.

Co-Chair Antoinette Braybrook said, "Whilst the announcement of an ALRC inquiry to examine the factors leading to the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is welcome, it is essential that the inquiry also consider issues relating to the prevention of family violence and reducing barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence to access quality, holistic, culturally safe legal services and supports."

"It is also critical that the Terms of Reference for the inquiry are developed in close consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, and those who are members of Change the Record. To ensure that the inquiry has a meaningful outcome, all levels of Government must commit to implementing the recommendations in full."

"The Federal Government should also take immediate steps to highlight its commitment to improving justice outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including by setting meaningful national justice targets through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and committing to review the implementation of RCIADIC" said Ms Braybrook.

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The 'Change the Record' (CTR) Coalition is a group of leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, community and human rights organisations working collaboratively to address the disproportionate rates of incarceration and violence experienced by Indigenous Australians.

The CTR Coalition has identified two goals:

- *Cut the disproportionate rates of violence to at least close the gap by 2040 with priority strategies for women and children; and*
- *Close the gap in rates of imprisonment by 2040.*

The CTR Coalition is calling for greater investment in early intervention, prevention and diversion strategies. These are smarter solutions that increase safety; address the root causes of violence against women, cut reoffending and imprisonment rates, and build stronger and safer communities.

The CTR Coalition Steering Committee includes:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner*
- *ANTaR*
- *Amnesty International*
- *Australian Council of Social Service*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission*
- *Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)*
- *First Peoples Disability Network (Australia)*
- *Human Rights Law Centre*
- *Law Council of Australia*
- *National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations*
- *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance*
- *National Association of Community Legal Centres*
- *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services*
- *National Congress of Australia's First Peoples*
- *National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum*
- *Oxfam Australia*
- *Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care*
- *Sisters Inside*
- *Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Andrew Jackomos*