



12 April 2016

The Hon Adam Giles MLA
Chief Minister
Parliament House
DARWIN NT 0800

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Dear Chief Minister,

On behalf of Amnesty International's 500,000 Australian supporters, I write to welcome your government's recently announced Aboriginal Affairs Strategy ('the Strategy'). In particular, Amnesty strongly welcomes the Strategy's commitment to a set of targets related to justice. This is an important and significant step. It makes the Northern Territory a leader among state and territory governments in taking concrete and measurable steps towards ending the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system.

Amnesty International's research and advocacy regarding the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's criminal justice system has focused on children and young people. As you would be aware, across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are 24 times more likely to be in detention than their non-Indigenous peers. In the Northern Territory, for the year between July 2013 and June 2014, Indigenous young people made up an average 96 per cent of all young people in detention.

That's why Amnesty welcomes the targets announced by your government – the targets represent an acknowledgment that this is a crisis, and demonstrates preparedness by your government to be held accountable.

Moreover, Amnesty acknowledges that states and territories cannot do all the heavy lifting alone. So, we urge you to call on the Australian government to set overarching national justice targets. This is a national crisis and, while we acknowledge your government's action is on the right track, Amnesty believes the Commonwealth needs to show leadership here.

The Commonwealth must play a role coordinating efforts by the states and territories in confronting the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system nationwide. The Council of Australian Governments – and its Law, Crime and Community Safety group in particular – is the vehicle from which this work could be driven.

At this stage, Amnesty is keen to see what steps the Northern Territory is planning on taking to ensure it meets the ambitious targets. In particular,

- When will a strategy be developed to underpin these targets as is the case in Victoria (under the Aboriginal Justice Agreement) and the Australian Capital Territory (under the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-22)?
- Will the recommendations of the [2011 Review of Northern Territory Youth Justice System](#), the 2015 Vita Review of Youth Detention and the Children's Commissioner's report into Don Dale guide the development of the strategy?
- How will Indigenous communities and leaders be involved in the development of a strategy to achieve a reduction in Indigenous youth detention rates?

We also note the current Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluating Framework as published by the Office of Aboriginal Affairs lists justice targets solely as a percentage. Amnesty recommends a revision. As they are currently constructed – as a

percentage of the total prison population and not as a per capita rate – we are concerned the targets could lead to unintended outcomes. That is, the Northern Territory could reach its juvenile detention target simply by incarcerating a greater number of non-Indigenous young people. We urge your government to amend the target to include one aimed at reducing per capita rates of imprisonment among Indigenous Territorians.¹

Amnesty would also urge the Northern Territory Government to seek comprehensive community input when it comes to further developing the policy strategy around the new targets. It will be crucial to ensure Indigenous Territorians are engaged with the process as it develops.

Finally, Amnesty is interested to know the extent to which your government intends to report on and monitor progress against the targets. While targets are a very positive step – which we strongly welcome – they are not an end in themselves. Without transparent and regular benchmarking, targets can lose value. Nonetheless, we congratulate your government for taking strong leadership.

I look forward to your response. Later in 2016, representatives from Amnesty International will be in Darwin to discuss issues related to Indigenous Youth Justice with government and non-government stakeholders. Our Government Relations Adviser, Guy Ragen, will be in contact with your office in coming months. In the meantime, he can be contacted on [Privacy](#) or [Privacy](#) to follow up the issues raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

[Privacy](#)

Claire Mallinson
National Director

¹ The Indigenous youth detention rate was 39.24 per 10,000 in 2013-14, which would translate to a target of 19.62 per 10,000 by 2030. Amnesty International has recommended that COAG agree to a target to end the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people within a generation. This would involve a target based on the per capita youth detention rate of 1.52 per 10,000 for non-Indigenous young people.