

Tuesday, 13 February 2018

Call for justice targets on 10th anniversary of Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples

The Law Council today redoubled its call for the Australian Government to create a series of justice targets to end the disproportionately high imprisonment rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The renewed call comes on the 10-year anniversary of the Rudd Government's [Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples](#) and one day after the Turnbull Government's tabling of the 10th [Closing the Gap report](#).

Despite representing less than three per cent of the population, 27 per cent of all adult prisoners identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Since the apology was given 10 years ago, imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has increased by 88 per cent.

Law Council President, Morry Bailes, said the incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is nothing short of a national crisis, requiring a strong national response.

"Australia's Indigenous imprisonment rates continue to be among the worst in the developed world," Mr Bailes said.

"Justice targets must be put back on the national agenda. These targets will help drive change among all Australian governments by outlining clear markers for improvement and creating accountability for falling short.

"As set out in the Change the Record Coalition's [Blueprint for Change](#), targets could include:

- to close the gap in the rates of imprisonment by 2040; and
- to cut the disproportionate rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to at least close the gap by 2040, with priority strategies for women and children.

"We are also anxiously awaiting the release of the Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into [Incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#) and hope it kickstarts change in this area," Mr Bailes said.

The Law Council also expressed disappointment at the Australian Government's [response](#) to the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

"The Australian Government had a unique opportunity to demonstrate national leadership regarding the important findings of the Royal Commission," Mr Bailes said.

"Unfortunately, it missed the chance to deliver a national, comprehensive, intergovernmental response to the recommendations. This includes on the landmark recommendation to raise the age of criminal responsibility.

"It is clear, as with the Closing the Gap report, we need strong Australian Government leadership and intergovernmental cooperation among states and territories," Mr Bailes said.

To learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice issues, visit the Law Council's [Justice Project](#) website.

Patrick Pantano: Public Affairs

P 02 6246 3715

E Patrick.Pantano@lawcouncil.asn.au

Sonia Byrnes: Communications

P 0437 078 850

E Sonia.Byrnes@lawcouncil.asn.au