

NT Royal Commission Final Report Response
Available for Immediate Release - 17th November 2017
National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (National Congress)
welcomes the release of the final report of the Royal Commission into the
Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

The report highlights a response to a crisis and it is evident that change is needed. As a nation, we are responsible for the abuse of our most vulnerable—our First Nations children. Our governments and institutions have breached the Racial Discrimination Act, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Prison guards employed to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have attacked and abused them, and no criminal convictions have been laid to date. The report states that youth detention centres are "not fit for accommodating, let alone rehabilitating, children and young people".

National Congress recognises the harrowing work of the Commissioners and the importance of the report, but is dismayed that such a report has been necessary over twenty-five years after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and ten years after the Bringing Them Home Report. Recommendations from both of these reports remain on the shelves, gathering dust.

Co-Chair Jackie Huggins said, "We repeat our call to State and Federal Governments to implement Justice targets within the Closing the Gap refresh agenda. Early intervention, diversion and rehabilitation must be front and centre of Australia's justice system to protect the lives of our children."

National Congress calls for Prime Minister Turnbull to move quickly to establish a National Action Plan and to fully fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal, family and children services.

In their National Voice for Our Children submission to the NT Royal Commission, SNAICC stated that 'connections to family, community, and culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are positive protective factors. This is evidenced by the enduring strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices in promoting healthy child development and the critical importance of continuity of cultural identity to child wellbeing.'

If governments continue to fail Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities, they are also failing our vulnerable youth, who must be raised in our communities.

"Governments must embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led community controlled solutions. Equally, there needs to be guaranteed long-term investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure they are sufficiently resourced to build the capacity to work with government," said National Congress Co-Chair, Rod Little.

END