



UN Human Rights Council 41st Session

***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are imprisoned at vastly disproportionate rates***

By Antoinette Braybrook (in a joint statement with the Human Rights Law Centre)

Mr President,

I am an Aboriginal woman. My family is Kuku Yalanji.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most incarcerated people in the world. We are demanding urgent action from the Australian governments to change this.

As an Aboriginal woman, I despair – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are the fastest growing prison population in our country. We are imprisoned at 21 times the rate of other women.

We make up 34% of the female prison population but comprise only 2.2% of the Australian female population. I thank the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women for bringing this grave statistic to the attention of the Human Rights Council.

Our women are overwhelmingly imprisoned for non-violent offences related to homelessness and poverty. Over 90% of our women in prison have experienced family violence. We are treated as the problem – a danger to society. We are not the problem.

Many of our women sit behind prison walls unsentenced and must be freed now.

I call on the Human Rights Council to hold the Australian governments accountable for the discriminatory over incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Urge our governments to move away from 'tough on crime' and 'law and order' approaches. Our governments must halt building new prisons and expanding existing ones. They must immediately abolish laws that target our people, including the law of public drunkenness in Victoria and Queensland.

We ask the Australian government to support our self-determination and preserve our national programs, not abolish them. This includes the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program and reinstating our National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services program as a stand-alone funding stream.

The Australian governments must stop locking up our people and taking our mothers away. Investing in our self-determination, not failing systems, will change the story for our people.

Thank you.

Geneva, 27 June 2019

\*This is the extended version of Djirra's positions on this issue. Due to time limitations, the oral presentation to the Human Rights Council was an abridged version of the above. Watch the video for the shortened version.