

NATIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICES

WORKING TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED JUSTICE OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

25 July 2016

Royal Commission welcome but a broader inquiry into the youth justice system is needed

The National Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Forum (National FVPLS Forum) welcomes the Prime Minister Turnbull's Royal Commission into the abuse of children in detention in the Northern Territory but has called for a broader inquiry into the youth justice system.

The Prime Minister's announcement follows last night's horrific *Four Corners* program revealing cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment of children in a juvenile detention centre in the NT.

"The National FVPLS Forum was shocked and appalled by the footage aired last night. It demonstrates a system wide callous disregard for the wellbeing and dignity of children in juvenile detention," said Phynea Clarke, Deputy Convenor of the National FVPLS Forum.

There has been a failure from the NT Government to act to address concerns with the treatment of children in juvenile detention raised by the previous and current NT Children's Commissioner. It is extremely disappointing that action was not taken earlier, particularly given the significance of this year, the 25th anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

"The Prime Minister has moved swiftly in calling the Royal Commission and it is imperative this inquiry proceeds with haste to hold those responsible to account and address systemic failings in the NT in a timely fashion," Ms Clarke said. "We cannot afford to have more children being exposed to such brutality and inhumane treatment."

Given the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth within the youth justice system, the establishment of the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference should rely heavily upon engagement with and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The National FVPLS Forum believes the Royal Commission announced today is an initial first step for a broader investigation across all Australian jurisdictions into the treatment of children in juvenile detention and the underlying factors driving engagement with the justice system.

It is imperative a broader inquiry examines the structural disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Particular consideration should be given to interrelation between family violence, child removal and incarceration. Governments of Australia have to shift from a punitive to a therapeutic approach within the youth justice system.

The National FVPLS Forum is also calling on the Federal Government to immediately ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) to ensure independent monitoring of all places of detention including juvenile detention facilities.

**Media Contact: Andy Gargett for Phynea Clarke, Deputy Convenor, National FVPLS Forum on 0457 544 591
or agargett@fvpls.org**

<http://www.nationalfvpls.org/>

Media Release