



## **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA MEDIA RELEASE**

May 4, 2021

### **NT YOUTH NEED SUPPORT, NOT PRISON**

Amnesty International Australia and Balunu Healing Foundation have called on the Northern Territory government to give kids a chance at breaking the cycle of disadvantage and crime by diverting them into culturally appropriate programs that address the underlying intergenerational trauma which too often leads to crime, instead of condemning them to the quicksand of the youth justice system.

Amendments to the youth justice act due to be debated this week in Parliament will prevent kids from accessing Indigenous-led diversion programs which are highly effective in addressing recidivism. The Northern Territory's own statistics show that more than 70% of children who complete a diversion program do not reoffend within 12 months of completion.

The Northern Territory Police's own [data](#) shows that of the 12 children sent to diversion programs in a recent spate of arrests, none reoffended.

"These amendments enforce the systemic racism our people have been battling for the past 230 years – putting little kids in prison instead of helping them deal with the complex issues in their lives simply hardens these children and does nothing whatsoever to address rates of reoffending," Amnesty International Australia Indigenous Rights Lead, Nolan Hunter, said.

"If this awful legislation passes, we must at least have a guarantee from Gunner on a provision that ensures kids are bailed to the diversion programs that are effective in keeping them out of prison, and driving down crime rates rather than automatically putting them behind bars."

The Indigenous-led Balunu Healing Foundation runs programs which work to increase the self-esteem, confidence and emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous youth to assist them to become strong, balanced individuals who will create strong families and positive pathways for future generations.

"Through deliberate and purposeful programs, Balunu aims to provide hope for Indigenous youth and families by breaking the cycle of disadvantage through good health, education, life skills, opportunity, training, employment and most importantly healing," Balunu founder David Cole said.

"We have been providing successful programs since 2006 and more than 800 children have attended our intensive healing camp, and we have delivered therapeutic workshops to more than 4000 people in the community.

"The recent Royal Commission into youth detention highlighted that the Balunu Healing Foundation was the only shining light in their investigation, which is effective in addressing the challenges faced by our youth. Programs like Balunu were a priority in the recommendations,

but since then, the Northern Territory government has spent millions of dollars on IT infrastructure and nothing on healing our children,” Cole said.

## **BACKGROUND**

Under the Gunner government’s leadership, 100% of children detained in the Territory’s prisons are Indigenous and have been since Michael Gunner came to office in 2016.

The [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) found that there were 693 offenders aged between 10 and 17 years, a decrease of 9% from 2018–19.

Despite requests from Amnesty International Australia, the Gunner government has failed to produce evidence that these amendments will address recidivism, nor has it provided evidence for the problem this legislation is trying to address.

## **ENDS**

**For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Amnesty International Media on +61 423 552 208 or [media@amnesty.org.au](mailto:media@amnesty.org.au)**

## **ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA**

Amnesty International is a global movement of 10 million people standing up for justice, freedom and equality. We work to free people unjustly jailed, bring torturers to justice and change oppressive laws. We shine a light on great wrongs by exposing the facts others try to suppress. We lobby governments, and the powerful to make sure they keep their promises and respect international law. Together, our voices challenge injustice and are powerful enough to change the world. [www.amnesty.org.au](http://www.amnesty.org.au)