



**Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**10 December 2012**

Statement by SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams on Human Rights Day

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a right to be heard and participate in decision-making**

SNAICC calls on governments in Australia to heed the themes for this year's Human Rights Day being celebrated across the globe today: inclusion and the right to participate in public life.

In 2012, Human Rights Day focuses on the rights of all people — women, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, the poor and marginalised — to make their voices heard in public life and be included in political decision-making.

The right to participate is a key ingredient to break the cycle of entrenched disadvantage and critical to improve the realisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights across Australia, including children and families.

In the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report in February — which revealed improvements in infant mortality rates and access to early childhood services but slower progress in other key areas — Ms Gillard said the foundations for overcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage have been laid.

SNAICC strongly maintains that building on these foundations will require genuine participation and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities.

SNAICC agrees with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda, who in his recent reports noted there had been a failure to appropriately support governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Mr Gooda called for a new approach “that supports, enables and empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine their own futures”.

“Where government plays the right role in the governance framework, that is, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to govern themselves, great things happen,” Mr Gooda wrote.

There is a wealth of national and international evidence that effective community governance and meaningful participation are essential to advance issues impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Community-driven solutions work — processes developed, designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely to be effective responses to the often complex challenges they face.

**SNAICC: The national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families**

Tomorrow (11 December) SNAICC will join other peak NGOs and senior officers from Australian Government departments in a roundtable meeting convened by the federal Attorney-General Nicola Roxon to discuss issues around implementing the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In June 2012 the committee reported on Australia's compliance with its child rights obligations. It expressed significant concern about the serious discrimination that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to experience, including in accessing basic services and their overrepresentation in out-of-home care and juvenile justice systems.

The committee made specific recommendations to respond to a gap it also identified in participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in policy making, decision-making and delivery of programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC hopes that the Human Rights Day theme of participation, a right in itself and an enabler for other fundamental human rights, will inform the Government's actions in prioritising the committee's fundamental recommendations in the roundtable meeting. These recommendations include:

- establishing and resourcing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Group to inform the development, planning, implementation and review of each "Closing the Gap" target in the specific context of child development, wellbeing and protection
- considering the creation of a Deputy Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's issues
- implementing in full the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in the various state and territory jurisdictions.

SNAICC commends Minister Roxon on the initiative and looks forward to engaging with the Government on how to action these and other recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to see real change on the ground for Australia's most discriminated children, including in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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