



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Visiting United Nations official calls for urgent attention on serious and widespread discrimination faced by Indigenous children

The recently retired Vice President of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Ms Marta Mauras Perez, has called on the Australian Government to urgently improve its efforts to redress persistent discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Ms Mauras Perez, who is visiting Australia next week and speaking on behalf of the UN committee, said this discrimination was particularly evident in Indigenous children's lack of access to basic services, and their very high numbers in the juvenile justice system and out-of-home care.

"Collective effort is needed to ensure that all children have the same opportunities for a healthy and fulfilling life. Evidence before the Committee in mid 2012 showed that this is still not the case for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children," Ms Mauras Perez said.

Ms Mauras Perez will visit the country as a guest of SNAICC and will be a keynote speaker at its national conference in Cairns from 4 to 6 June, as well as engaged in various other events and meetings, including with Federal members of parliament.

Ms Mauras Perez said the Convention on the Rights of the Child — to which Australia is a signatory — provided a strong, universal blueprint for the basic needs of children.

"It is also the first international legally binding agreement that recognises the special and unique rights of Indigenous children. This Convention provides a clear map for urgent priorities to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children — Australia's most vulnerable citizens," she said.

"Participation of Indigenous peoples is at the core of change for Indigenous children. The power of mechanisms and supports that enable genuine participation can be staggering. Similarly, allocating clear resources and improving monitoring mechanisms will see tangible benefits for the most vulnerable groups.

"I look forward to learn about developments in these areas on my visit to Australia."

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

Ms Mauras Perez, who was Special Rapporteur for Australia in 2012, said the disproportionate impact of poverty on Indigenous children was a major issue requiring recognition and redress across the globe.

She said: “Sadly, the statistics indicate that this is no different in Australia. Structural change through education, ensuring access to basic services and housing, and gender equality are critical.

“Consequences of poverty and discrimination also generally see high rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls. We have all got to stand together to redress the causes behind violence and put prevention, rehabilitation and support processes in place.”

Ms Mauras Perez said it was also important to focus on the cultural rights of children as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“Our committee has major concerns around the large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children still separated from their homes and communities and placed into care with families where there is not enough support to ensure that they fully live their culture and language. This is an issue that has been of repeated concern to the committee,” she said.

“These are complex issues with no easy answers. However, we see from examples across the world that sustained effort over time working with communities to find and implement solutions sees change happen.”

Background information

In June 2012, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reviewed Australia’s efforts to comply with the United Convention on the Rights of the Child. It found Australia was failing to protect and support its vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The UN committee expressed deep concern about inadequate standards of living and health, access to education and housing, higher suicide death, homelessness, high levels of family violence as serious issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The committee was very clear that Australia’s human rights obligations require far more from the Government and made a number of recommendations, including:

- meaningful participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in decisions impacting on their children
- long-term national strategies that respond to the causes of disadvantage and build on evidence of what works
- prioritising early intervention approaches to support families in situations of heightened vulnerability, and prevent abuse and neglect of children;

- considering the appointment of a Deputy Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's issues at the national and/or state/territory levels, and
- addressing disparities in access to services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families and consider free or affordable early years care for all children.

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