



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Statement by SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams

Australia has the resources to be a leader on human rights — so why the lack of progress?

Today is International Human Rights Day — an opportune time to reflect that it's been 18 months since the report from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which found Australia's efforts wanting in relation to its most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The committee's report was strong in its findings, highlighting the continued serious and widespread discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in accessing health, education and housing services.

Just as important, it provided a set of comprehensive recommendations for the Australian government to improve the protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights.

At the heart of these recommendations was the need to ensure the meaningful participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the policy formulation, decision-making and implementation of programs affecting them.

The recommendations also sought to improve the way we monitor and measure progress on government policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens.

Tellingly, the UN Committee was moved to express its frustrations with Australia's failure to adopt its past recommendations.

Unfortunately, Australia is on track for similar criticism in the committee's next review (Australia is due to report in 2018) given the disappointing lack of progress since June 2012.

There have been positives — for example, improvements in Indigenous child mortality rates and enrolments in early childhood education, and the appointment of a National Children's Commissioner — but these have been

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outweighed by little action to respond to the recommendations and poor outcomes in other areas.

Today, people across the globe may well ask: What is preventing an affluent and democratic country such as Australia from doing a better job of promoting and protecting the human rights of its most vulnerable citizens — from being a world leader on this issue?

Our children deserve more urgency from governments — which need to empower and trust in the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to deliver local solutions.

Tony Abbott has taken on the mantle of being the “Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs”. He has an opportunity to deliver on that tag by making real and sustained improvement in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children a priority for the new government.

A recent SNAICC paper outlined priority areas for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The initiatives align with the UN Committee recommendations and provide some concrete avenues for action.

Among our list of priorities, we have urged the government to take a leadership role on reducing the number of our children and families coming into contact with the child protection system by introducing a Closing the Gap target on child protection.

SNAICC has also called for greater investment in, and support for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services.

These and other basic steps identified in the SNAICC paper would help to enhance the lives of our children and families — and the reputation of Australia in the eyes of the world community.

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