



Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

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ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AMONG AUSTRALIA'S MOST VULNERABLE

Sydney, Australia: Today's release of a new report from the Australian Childs Rights Task Force, led by UNICEF Australia and the National Children's and Youth Law Centre, shows limited progress towards the realisation of rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across numerous critical indicators – with some in regress.

The report, marking 25 years since Australia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, considers the progress of children across a number of key areas including family life, education and care, justice, and health.

The last 25 years have seen some important steps towards the recognition of rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including through the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner role in 1992. Australia has also become party to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and has seen the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) drive significant investments in access to education, health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (both in 2009).

Unfortunately, however, this recognition has not translated into tangible results, with progress under the NIRA not on track across all areas of reform, and many of the rights accorded under the CRC and UNDRIP remaining unsupported in Australian legislation.

Most tellingly, despite recognition of past and ongoing rights concerns, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rights violations are still pervasive across Australia.

Amongst the most tragic of children's rights violations in Australia's history is the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, infamously recognised around the world as the *Stolen Generations*. In 1997, the outcomes of a national inquiry into these events were detailed in the *Bringing them Home* report that made 54 recommendations to redress the trauma experienced by former and current generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. At this time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented one in five children in the child protection system. They now represent one in three.



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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 5.5 per cent of all Australian children, yet comprise 35 per cent of the care population, despite the national adoption of an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*. In relation to this, Australia received international criticism in a review before the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2012 for failing to provide access to essential services and for the alarming over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth in the criminal justice system and out-of-home care.

Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

- are more than twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable than non-Indigenous children (yet national targets to ensure their access to early childhood education have not been met),
- represent 19.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in poverty, compared to 12.4 per cent of non-Indigenous children,
- are also overrepresented in the justice system with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths aged 10-17 years in detention increasing from 19 times the rate of non-Indigenous young people in 2011, to 26 times in 2015.

SNAICC CEO Gerry Moore comments: “The lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families remain uniquely shaped by the impacts of colonisation and resulting intergenerational trauma. A rights based response must draw on these strengths, to increase investment in supports that heal and strengthen families, empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations to self determine responses, and ensure that all decisions regarding the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are made with the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and children themselves.”

At the report launch Adrian Graham, Chief Executive Officer of UNICEF Australia, surmised: “Australia is not the lucky country for many children. The well being of children should be shaped by sound leadership and policy choices. The Australian Child Rights Progress Report is a clear reminder that Australia must place equity at the heart of our agenda for children, with the idea that no child should be left behind. The Taskforce calls on the Australian Government to adopt a comprehensive national policy agenda for children that includes measures to ensure that all children growing up in Australia have a decent quality of life.”

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About SNAICC:

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Founded in 1981, SNAICC was established to engage in activities that promote and accommodate a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Over the past 30 years SNAICC's efforts have resulted in many key milestones and achievements both in policy developments at state, territory and federal levels and in developing innovative and useful resources for the sector.

SNAICC is governed by an influential National Executive made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and families' services.