



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

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Statement by H.E. The Hon Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

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Australia is committed to equitable access to justice for all Indigenous Australians.

Sadly, Indigenous Australians experience disproportionately high rates of contact with the justice system. Australia recognises this issue cannot be considered in isolation from historical and socio-economic factors, which Australia's new Agreement on Closing the Gap seeks to ameliorate.

As part of our nation's journey to reconciliation, Australia is committed to supporting a process of local truth-telling. This will involve partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities; and local, state and territory governments together acknowledging the histories and experiences of Indigenous Australians in partnership with all Australians. The core element of 'do no harm' will inform Australia's process of local truth-telling.

The Healing Foundation, a national Indigenous organisation, partners with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by historical injustices. The Foundation supports locally-run projects. One project in the Northern Territory supports Indigenous men through healing activities, to gain confidence to take up employment, and overcome issues such as family violence, incarceration, and poor health and wellbeing.

Australia supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve justice and community safety outcomes. Australia also recognises the specific challenges Indigenous women and youth face in accessing justice and works with these groups to co-design solutions.

Reducing violence against women and their children, especially Indigenous women, is a priority of all Australian governments. Discrimination, racism and intergenerational trauma are drivers of violence experienced by Indigenous women. Breaking the cycle of violence requires community-driven, trauma-informed approaches that prioritise cultural healing and family restoration. Solutions must support frontline and prevention services, and address structural drivers of violence, including those contributing to increased rates of female Indigenous incarceration. The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022 establishes the collective action of all governments to prevent and reduce violence.

Indigenous sentencing courts across Australia allow Indigenous Elders and community members to participate in culturally appropriate court processes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, and Custody Notification Services deliver culturally safe support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in contact with the justice system.

Australia acknowledges the time has come to have an honest conversation around the factors driving Indigenous incarceration rates: police and justice systems should be equipped to work in culturally appropriate ways, and governments should invest in the early years to improve health, education and employment outcomes. At the same time, Australia acknowledges that lasting change will only be brought about through systemic improvements, and that our commitments need to be given the chance to work.

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