



MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN BAR ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT VISITS NORTHERN TERRITORY AND TIMOR LESTE, DILI

The President of the Australian Bar Association, Patrick O'Sullivan QC, is this week shining a spotlight on some of the legal issues facing the Northern Territory and our regional neighbours in Timor Leste, Dili with a visit to Australia's top end.

Honouring his commitment to meet with State and Territory Attorneys- General and respective opposition member this year, Mr O'Sullivan QC has this week met with Northern Territory Attorney-General John Elferink and Shadow Minister for Corrections Natasha Fyles to discuss a range of issues including indigenous incarceration, bail laws for juveniles, mandatory sentencing, fine default imprisonment and domestic violence.

"The Australian Bar Association and the Northern Territory Bar Association recently voiced concerns about the Territory's proposed bail legislation which would remove the presumption in favour of bail for juveniles in relation to repeat property offenders. If the proposed legislation becomes law, it will have the effect of making it harder for children to get bail before they receive a trial. This proposal flies in the face of the presumption of innocence and the fundamental principle that imprisonment of a child should be the last resort," said Mr O'Sullivan QC.

"The ABA believes these laws will disproportionately target young indigenous men in the Northern Territory, where the rate of indigenous people in prison is close to 90 percent. Indigenous incarceration is a national crisis and we need to be looking at solutions that divert indigenous people from the criminal justice system, not the other way around."

Whilst in Darwin, Mr O'Sullivan QC also met with the new Chief Justice of the Northern Territory, The Hon Michael Grant CJ.

"It was a pleasure to meet with and discuss various issues with him. He comes with an exemplary reputation as an advocate of the highest order and his vast experience across so many areas will serve the Court well."

On Thursday 14th July, the ABA President will travel to Timor Leste, Dili to attend the 2016 Northern Territory Bar Association's annual conference.

“The conference provides an important opportunity for the Australian Bar and the legal profession as a whole to observe the Timor Leste legal system and see how the Australian Bar may be able to assist” said Mr O’Sullivan QC.

“Dili is one of Australia’s closest neighbours in the region, and one that has seen a significant amount of change in recent times.”

Issues to be presented and discussed at the conference include judicial independence and accountability, maritime issues in the Timor Gap, regional opportunities for commercial arbitration, youth justice and domestic violence.

To view the ABA’s previous statement on the Northern Territory’s proposed bail laws visit: <http://www.austbar.asn.au/archives/2600>

MEDIA ENQUIRIES: Jo Oakes Mobile: 0439 700 076 email: media@austbar.asn.au