



MEDIA RELEASE

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ABA backs coalition to end over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in justice system – in one generation

The Australian Bar Association (ABA) has pledged its support of the National Justice Coalition ‘Change the Record’ campaign to end the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system within a generation.

The campaign was launched this morning in Redfern, where leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, community and human rights organisations, including the ABA and the Law Council of Victoria, came together to outline the new approach, designed to tackle the shocking rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ imprisonment and experience of violence.

“ABS data tells the terrible story,” said Fiona McLeod SC, President of the ABA. “Numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison rose by 88% between 2004 and 2014, while women and children in this part of our community are at much higher risk of family violence than non-Indigenous people.

“It is one of the most significant human rights challenges our Nation faces. We need to change our approach to crime and public safety; past approaches are not getting results and this cannot go on.”

Former ABA Treasurer and immediate past president of the NSW Bar Association, Phillip Boulten SC, will chair the ABA Working Party contributing to finding new ways to approach the issue and feeding them into the work of the campaign, and the work of the other Coalition organisations.

Together they will work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop and implement smarter, evidence-based and more cost-effective solutions that increase safety, address the root causes of violence against women and children, cut reoffending and imprisonment rates, and build stronger communities. Twelve basic tenets include:

1. Invest in communities, not prisons
2. Local communities have the answers
3. Recognise the driving factors of imprisonment
4. Focus on safety
5. Services, not sentences
6. Community policing, not policing the community
7. Smarter sentencing
8. Eliminate unnecessary imprisonment
9. Adopt community justice approaches
10. Young people don’t belong in prison
11. Rehabilitation, not just punishment
12. Reintegration not recidivism

“This is an exciting and promising initiative to help us, as a Nation develop and then meet the justice targets in the Government’s Closing the Gap Strategy. Together we can draw on our combined experience and expertise to identify what the solutions are and work with the public, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the government to implement them,” said Ms McLeod.

Details about the campaign, including media kits and background information can be found here:
<http://www.changetherecord.org.au>

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