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NT Government's 'unacceptable' Don Dale backflip fails young people and community

The Law Society Northern Territory and Law Council of Australia have called on the Gunner government to honour its commitment to replace the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre with a new purpose-built facility as a matter of urgency.

The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Territory, released in November 2017, recommended Don Dale be closed and replaced to protect the safety and rights of children in detention.

The NT Government promised to implement all 227 Royal Commission recommendations, however, a year on Don Dale remains.

Law Society NT President, Maria Savvas, said the delay in building a new youth detention facility was concerning, especially given the Territory's ballooning youth imprisonment rate.

"We trusted that the NT Government was acting in good faith to implement these measures as swiftly as possible, but it is taking too long – the delay is unacceptable," Ms Savvas said.

"Every day of inaction is another day that children are being detained in a facility that is unsuitable, impacting on their physical and mental wellbeing.

"The Royal Commission provided a blueprint for urgent and much-needed reform – that can't be pushed to the side while our young people are detained in a sub-standard facility."

Law Council of Australia President, Arthur Moses SC, backed the calls of the Law Society NT, describing the process as 'disgracefully slow'.

"The Australian legal profession is extremely concerned by reports that the NT Government has abandoned plans to build the new centre at a previously-identified site, with no alternative proposed," Mr Moses said.

"Children are being held in a former adult prison facility, which was not fit for adults. When I visited Don Dale earlier this year, I was deeply troubled that despite the good intentions of staff at the centre, it was unsuitable for the care of young people.

"If the NT Government is struggling with either the resolve or capacity to follow through then the Commonwealth Government must step in to ensure this is fixed.

"We have written to the Prime Minister and Chief Minister regarding this matter."

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