



MEDIA RELEASE

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CRA calls for Federal Government reform of the youth justice system

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) has called on the Federal Government to lead a nationally coordinated reform of the youth justice system, in a recent letter to the Prime Minister and Minister for Indigenous Australians.

In its letter, CRA expressed grave concerns about the state of the youth justice system in the Northern Territory, following the Inquest findings of Territory Coroner Elisabeth Armitage into the death of Kumanjaji Walker, a First Nation's youth in custody. The Coroner found that the Northern Territory Police Force bears "significant hallmarks of institutional racism" and that "racist attitudes may have influenced" the "failure to take adequate steps to minimise the risk of a fatal interaction" with Kumanjaji Walker.

"Kumanjaji Walker was failed by the justice system in the Northern Territory. Juvenile detention isolated him from family and community for considerable periods of time throughout his childhood, and did not provide adequate early intervention or rehabilitation," said CRA President, Br Gerard Brady CFC.

CRA also highlighted with alarm recent legislative changes in the Northern Territory, including the lowering of the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 10, the reintroduction of spit hoods in youth detention centres, and the expansion of the list of offences ineligible for youth diversionary justice programs.

"Australia's religious women and men add their support to the calls from First Nations organisations and individuals for Federal Government leadership on a national overhaul of the youth justice system, moving away from punitive approaches and instead prioritising early intervention and holistic and culturally appropriate rehabilitation," said Anne Walker, CRA National Executive Director.

"The recently released Closing the Gap Report shows that this is a national problem. Most States and Territories have a minimum age of criminal responsibility below that recommended by child development and health experts, and Australia is not on track to reach the Closing the Gap target to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention by at least 30% by 2031. We need urgent Federal Government action," Anne concluded.

Read CRA's [Open Letter](#).

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