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AUSTRALIA SLAMMED OVER INDIGENOUS INCARCERATION RATES AT UN

The UN Human Rights Committee responsible for conducting a review of Australia's compliance with human rights has today raised with an Australian Government delegation the case of Ms Dhu, an Aboriginal woman who died in custody in Western Australia after being arrested for defaulting on fines. The Committee pressed the delegation on whether recommendations made by the WA Coroner in the wake of Ms Dhu's case to repeal imprisonment for defaulting on fines had been implemented, and if not, why not. The Committee suggested that the fine default laws need to be scrapped.

The national imprisonment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults is 13 times higher than that for non-Indigenous adults. Whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 2 per cent of the population, they account for 27 per cent of the prison population in Australia.

Australia was reviewed for its compliance with human rights this week by the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva. Committee members asked Australia pressing questions on Indigenous incarceration rates and the human rights concerns raised.

Kingsford Legal Centre Director, Anna Cody, who is in Geneva for the review said, "Australia just got a seat on the UN Human Rights Council this week, on a platform of leading on Indigenous rights. Yet less than 3 days later, we've seen the government's lack of action on Indigenous incarceration highlighted by the UN. Australian government statements at the review that they recognise Indigenous incarceration rates are appalling are not enough – what we need is immediate action to repeal fine default laws that result in imprisonment of Indigenous Australians, and the implementation of diversionary programs."

Kingsford Legal Centre and Human Rights Law Centre coordinated the Australian NGO delegation who attended the review in Geneva.

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