National Commission for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Children and Young People

THURSDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2026
MEDIA STATEMENT

Attributable to the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People - Sue-Anne Hunter

I welcome the visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Dr Albert K. Barume, to Australia, the first visit by the Special Rapporteur since 2017, and confirm I will be meeting with him to raise my serious concerns about the child protection and youth justice systems in this country.

What I cannot support is the decision by the Queensland and Northern Territory Governments to block the UN Special Rapporteur from visiting their youth detention centres, Cleveland in Townsville and Holtze in the Northern Territory.

This is now the second time in less than a year the Northern Territory Government has blocked UN human rights experts from its places of detention. In late 2025, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention was also denied access.

The refusal to allow access raises serious questions about transparency and accountability. If governments are confident children are safe and their rights are being upheld, independent scrutiny should not be feared.

Refusing independent scrutiny tells me these governments are not treating the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as a priority. Australia has voluntarily committed to independent oversight and scrutiny through the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Those commitments cannot be selectively applied when scrutiny becomes uncomfortable.

While youth detention is administered by states and territories, Australia's obligations under international human rights law ultimately sit with the Commonwealth. First Nations children should not miss out on independent scrutiny because governments dispute responsibility.

First Nations children deserve safety. They deserve to have their rights upheld and a system that protects them.

To the Queensland and Northern Territory Governments directly: prove me wrong. Open your youth detention centres to the Special Rapporteur before his visit ends on 13 November, and show that you are keeping children safe from harm.

First Nations children are entitled to the same protections, dignity and accountability as every other child in Australia. If governments have confidence in their systems, they should open the doors and allow the Special Rapporteur to see those systems firsthand.

ENDS

Media Contact: Dea Burness - dea@steadyground.com.au / 0402 484 721

National Commission for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Children and Young People

About the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

The National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (The Commission) is a statutory agency dedicated to promoting the rights, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The National Commission works to elevate First Nations voices, advocate for systemic reform and drive evidence-based policy and practice that supports strong, thriving futures for children, families and communities.