



STATEMENT: NGO coalition calls for governments to commit to meaningful national child rights standards in youth justice

1 September 2023 - The Australian Child Rights Taskforce is urgently calling for a renewed commitment by all Australian governments to meeting international human rights standards in youth justice, after Queensland overturned its own Human Rights Act to detain children in adult watch houses.

Last week the Queensland Government rushed through a controversial law to allow children to be detained in adult watch houses indefinitely by overriding its own Human Rights Act for the second time this year, a move that has been condemned by multiple organisations and experts including the Australian Child Rights Taskforce, as well as the National Children's Commissioner.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Taskforce have noted with disapproval the failure of Australian Governments to meet human rights standards in youth justice for many years and made repeated recommendations for greater compliance.

Aram Hosie, Executive Director of Strategy and Public Affairs at Save the Children Australia, a member of the Taskforce, said a concerning nationwide pattern of child rights violations had emerged in the youth justice system.

"Recent human rights breaches in youth justice include the well-documented use of spit hoods and other unacceptable practices in the NT, transferring children from youth detention to an adult prison in Victoria, reported violence at youth detention centres in NSW, and serious ongoing issues in Banksia Hill and Unit 18 in Casuarina adult prison in Western Australia," he said.

"The decision by the Queensland Government to undermine its own commitment to human rights is the latest in a long series of failures by state and territory governments to adopt rights respecting responses to youth justice, and these knee-jerk decisions ultimately do not make communities safer."

"It is time to break the cycle of ineffective knee-jerk responses and reimagine a youth justice system in Australia which upholds the rights of children, placing all of us on a pathway to a more just society."

The Australian Child Rights Taskforce calls for a national response to address these continued breaches by governments, and national standards in youth justice that reflect international child rights standards and are monitored and enforced by an independent authority.

ENDS

NOTES:

- The Australian Child Rights Taskforce is a coalition of over a hundred organisations, networks and individuals committed to the protection of the rights of children and young people in Australia. The Taskforce supports and coordinates civil society reporting to the United Nations on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The Taskforce operates in line with established child rights principles, as reflected in this statement. However, this statement may not reflect the views of every individual Taskforce member.