



MEDIA RELEASE

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Give all Australians a level playing field

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) today renewed its call for the Rudd Government to repeal laws that result in unjust and unfair sentences.

This follows comments yesterday by NT Supreme Court Justice Stephen Southwood in regard to the sentencing sections of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) legislation.

Justice Southwood said the existence of the section meant Judges were *'not able to fully evaluate the moral culpability of offenders'* and went on to say, *'this may lead to disproportionate sentences'*.

The NTER laws currently prohibit any cultural practice of any ethnicity being used to reduce or increase the objective seriousness of an offence.

"The NTER Act, introduced by the Howard Government in 2007, is currently under review," NAAJA Chairman, Norman George, said.

"This decision of Justice Southwood's adds more weight to calls that have come from around the nation to repeal the law, especially those discriminatory sections.

"This is not just an Indigenous issue. All Australians should enjoy a level playing field in the Court System.

"The Rudd Government should seize this opportunity.

"In a multi-cultural society like Australia, it is shameful to have laws that prohibit the courts from properly informing themselves, thus leading to unfair sentences.

"This gives us an unjust legal system.

"It is not enough to just say sorry, it is about fixing it and making it better," Mr George said.

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