



North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency

NAAJA Media Release

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Mass incarceration is the real story

NAAJA says the real story that undermines the justice system in the NT is the mass incarceration of Aboriginal people in over-crowded, hot prisons that contributed to yesterday's riot at Alice Springs prison.

Mr. Pearce said the riot showed there was an urgent need to divert people from prison with new programs and changes to the bail laws.

He said of the 2200 prisoners in the NT justice system, 1900 were Aboriginal people and 40% were on remand and waiting in prison for a trial, or to be sentenced.

“The justice system is broken in the NT and the underlying social problems are getting worse ... and rehabilitation just isn't possible in crowded, 40-degree prisons without adequate programs, air-conditioning or facilities,” Mr. Pearce said.

“Laws and policies in the NT have a discriminatory impact on Aboriginal people and the bail laws need to be changed, to give courts more discretion to grant bail.

“Governments also need to make ‘justice re-investments’, to spend money on the underlying causes of offending and to support people with employment, education, health, and training. It's an evidence-based approach that reduces re-offending.”

Mr. Pearce said it was expensive to lock people up and it didn't make the community safer, nor did it address the on-going problems of poverty and despair.

“NAAJA calls on the NT Government to urgently convene a Justice Reinvestment Summit to prevent this mass incarceration of Aboriginal people; and to consider options like Community Courts, return-to-country programs and family support.”

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