

27th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Oral statement delivered by Ms Anna Brown

Item 6 General Debate

Thank-you Mr President,

At its Universal Periodic Review in 2011, Australia received a number of recommendations in relation to the rights of Indigenous peoples. This statement is an update to the Council on their implementation and other key developments.

Over-imprisonment of Indigenous peoples was raised as a key concern during Australia's last UPR. Unfortunately, instead of making progress this problem is getting significantly worse. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less than three per cent of the general population but constitute 27 per cent of the prison population. Indigenous women are the fastest growing prisoner demographic in Australia, with numbers increasing by 18 per cent in the past 12 months.

Just last month, a 22 year old Indigenous woman died after being held in police custody for four days. She had been detained for non-payment of a fine. This is not an isolated event – an Indigenous death in custody occurs on average about once every month. Although Australia received and accepted recommendations to fund prevention, diversion and rehabilitation programs; and to only use prison as a sentence of last resort, over-imprisonment and resulting deaths in custody clearly remain a serious ongoing concern.

Australia remains yet to ratify and ensure independent oversight of custodial facilities, despite accepting recommendations to this effect during its last UPR.

Indigenous women continue to experience family violence at disproportionately high rates, with most Indigenous women in prison reporting a causal factor as being their previous experiences of family violence. Despite this, the Australian Government recently announced the likely defunding of all Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services – the principal gender and culturally specific legal service for Indigenous women.

Mr President,

Australia's second UPR is taking place in 2015. We call on the Council and member states to urge Australia to commit to properly implementing the 2011 UPR recommendations and to better protect and promote the rights of Indigenous peoples in Australia.

Thank you.