Statement at the 38th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
2 July 2018

Item 9: General Debate

Speaker: Keenan Mundine

Mr President.

I have spent more than half of my life behind bars.

I can still smell the prison cell I was locked in as a child. A tiny, cold cell. My first night in that cell was the loneliest of my life.

Mr President, right now, children as young as ten are being locked away in prisons across Australia.

This year alone, around 600 children under the age of 14 will be taken from their families and communities and locked up.

Most of these children are Indigenous – like me.

This council and many UN bodies have urged Australian Governments to raise the age of criminal responsibility.

In joining this Council, the Australian Government promised to champion the rights of Indigenous peoples.

But, for as long as Indigenous children are 25 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous children, these will be hollow promises.

I have travelled from across the world to address this Council because I want my two sons to live in a country that treats them fairly.

This Council should demand that all Australian Governments raise the age of criminal responsibility.

All Indigenous children deserve what I was denied - equality and freedom.

Thank you.