



AUSTRALIAN
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Media release

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Coroners findings into death of Ms Dhu deeply disturbing

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (**ALHR**) is deeply concerned by the shocking Coroner's findings, released today, regarding the death in custody of a 22 year old Yamatji woman in August 2014. Ms Dhu had been detained in the South Hedland lockup for unpaid fines.

ALHR strongly supports WA State Coroner Ros Fogliani's key recommendations and calls on the Western Australian Government to prioritise its promised reforms aimed ending the practice of 'imprisoning people for unpaid fines' and urgently implementing a mandatory custody notification service (CNS)

Aboriginal women are a particularly vulnerable group at risk of being locked up for defaulting payment of a fine, and comprise 22 per cent of all fine default prisoners.

"The WA Government should immediately abandon its controversial fine default system that makes incarceration automatic for those who do not pay. Australian and State governments must commit now to legislate for a national custody notification system that finally achieves key recommendation 224 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Such a system enables swift enquiries to be made as to the health and welfare of every Indigenous person taken into custody", said David Woodroffe, Co-Chair of ALHR's Indigenous Rights Subcommittee.

According to Dr Amy Maguire, also Co-Chair of ALHR's Indigenous Rights Subcommittee, "The appalling treatment received by a vulnerable and gravely ill woman is a complete failure of appropriate medical and custodial care. There must be an end to the continuing tragedy of Indigenous deaths in custody".

The human rights and safety of Indigenous people must be protected now. 25 years on from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Ms Dhu's death is an indictment on the Australian legal system. Particularly significant is the Coroner's finding that the

inadequate care extended to Ms Dhu was influenced by preconceived notions about Aboriginal people.

Although the Coroner's findings are important, they do not seek to apportion individual responsibility to the police or hospital staff who subjected Ms Dhu to "unprofessional and inhumane" treatment. ALHR extends its solidarity to the family and friends of Ms Dhu, who are entitled to see those responsible for her ill-treatment held accountable.

To arrange an interview with Dr Amy Maguire, Co-Chair of the ALHR Indigenous Rights Subcommittee or Verity Long-Droppert, ALHR WA Convenor, please contact Matt Mitchell on 0431 980 365 or media@alhr.org.au.

For more information on ALHR please visit <http://www.alhr.org.au>