

Kids don't belong in prison cells

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



What is happening?

In the Northern Territory, First Nations children are incarcerated at disproportionately high rates, compounding trauma and disadvantage for these children, fracturing families and communities, and removing them from their culture. This is occurring in the context the Territory government continuing to pursue carceral, colonial responses to youth crime and maintaining a criminal age of responsibility that is far too young.

On the 24th of August, Territorians will vote to elect their next government. Some political parties and candidates are choosing to use young kids as political footballs in the election debate, instead of addressing the root causes of youth crime.

Amnesty's campaign

At the upcoming election, The Northern Territory is at risk of changing the age of criminal responsibility from twelve to as young as ten years old.

Amnesty International Australia is campaigning in the Territory to reduce the number of Indigenous children incarcerated and ensure their ongoing protection by raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14, in line with international human rights standards.

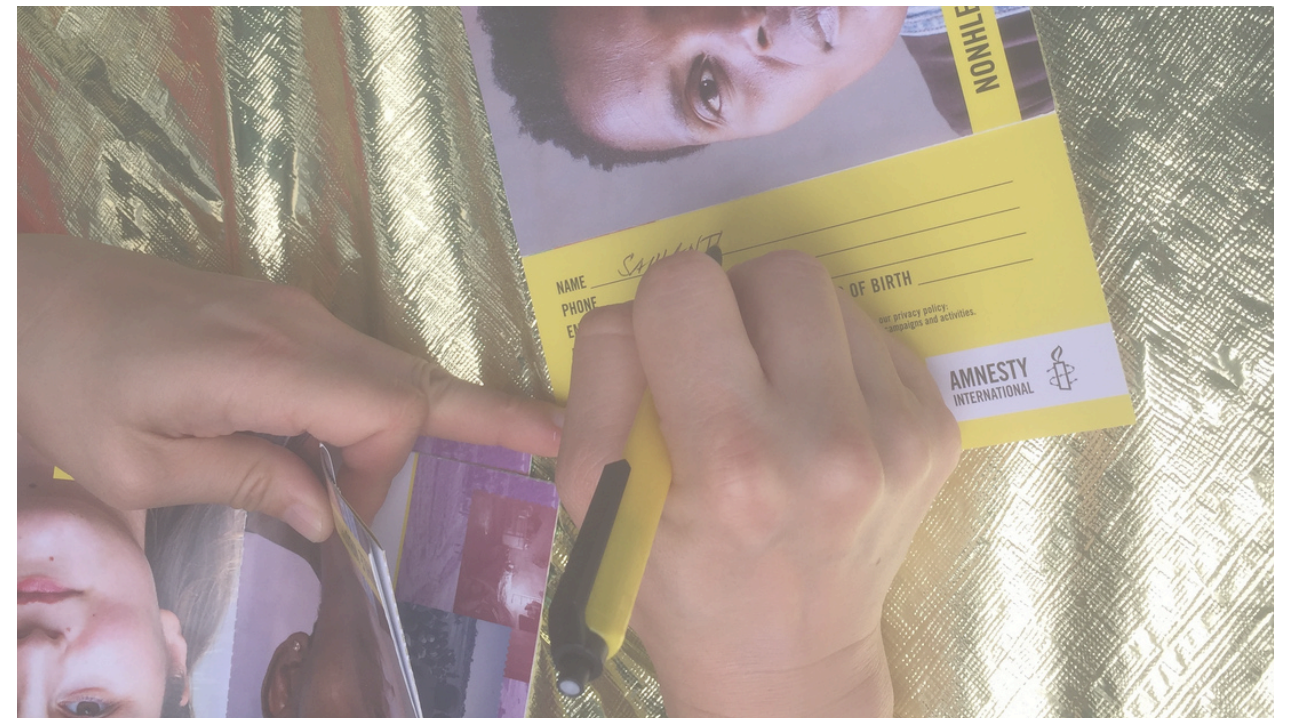
We are also asking the future government of the Northern Territory to fund culturally-appropriate alternatives to incarceration that centre First Nations voices, address the root causes of trauma and disadvantage, and uphold the principles of self-determination.

About raising the age of criminal responsibility

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on countries to raise the age to at least 14 years old. China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Sierra Leone, Azerbaijan, Cambodia and Rwanda have taken this step and we must do the same for Australian kids.

There is an overwhelming amount of medical and psychological evidence that shows us children's brains are still developing, especially the parts that regulate judgement, decision-making and impulse control. This means that kids cannot foresee the consequences of any action and cannot fully understand the criminal nature of their behaviour. Whether sentenced or unsentenced, children can not navigate the full weight of their actions and do not belong in prison.

Putting kids in prison leads to compounding trauma and disadvantage, it fractures families and communities and removes children from their culture. The root causes of this issue include a complete lack of understanding of the realities of colonisation and its effects, leading to a historical and continuing lack of centering First Nations voices and learning, which has resulted in a lack of self-determination.



7 reasons to raise the age of criminal responsibility now

Putting kids in prison doesn't make our community any safer

We all want a safer Northern Territory. Evidence shows that locking up children does not make our community safer. Instead, it perpetuates cycles of harm and trauma.

Putting kids in prison doesn't teach them a lesson

Children deserve guidance and support, not prison cells. Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 ensures our kids get the help they need to grow into responsible adults.

Kids brains are still developing at 12 and 13

Medical and psychological research proves that children's brains are still developing. They cannot fully understand the consequences of their actions, which is why they need support, not incarceration.

Putting kids in prison weakens our communities

Imprisoning children disrupts their connection to their culture and community, which are vital for their development. Keeping children within their communities strengthens families and promotes healing.

Australia is lagging behind the world by locking up kids

Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 aligns with international human rights standards and ensures a fairer, more just system for all children.

There are strong alternatives to locking up kids

Investing in health and education to address the root causes of youth offending helps create a brighter future for our children and a stronger, more resilient community. Indigenous led alternatives to incarceration, centered on First Nations voices, are proven to be more effective in reducing reoffending and supporting children's well-being.

Kids deserve dignity

Every child deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Raising the age of criminal responsibility protects the rights and futures of our children.