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## Outcomes not promises the key to Closing the Gap

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- Leaders of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), the Uniting Church and UnitingCare Australia have described as a lamentable failure today's revelation that Australia will not meet most of its Closing the Gap targets, while at the same welcoming the Federal Government's promise of a more inclusive approach to First Peoples' issues.**

The President of the Uniting Church Dr Deidre Palmer has joined UAICC National President Rev. Garry Dronfield and UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little in lamenting today's Closing the Gap report as "a serious humanitarian crisis".

The Prime Minister, Scott Morrison launched the 12th annual Closing the Gap report in Federal Parliament today. In his address to the Parliament, Mr Morrison made clear that five of the seven Closing the Gap targets were not on track nor would they be met in the expected time frame.

Mr Morrison also flagged a new approach by the Government, one which he said would focus on "true partnership" with First Peoples, on giving back responsibility, of listening and empowering. However he said there would be no change to the Government's policy in relation to First Peoples' request for a "voice to the Federal Parliament".

"It is disappointing that after 12 years of Closing the Gap, First Australians still remain the most disadvantaged of all Australians," said Rev. Garry Dronfield, National President of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

"The child mortality rates and life expectancy of Aboriginal people in our country are far too high, and the Government needs to do more to address this fundamental injustice."

"We intend to hold the Prime Minister to his word about partnership and listening, and we expect better outcomes for our people."

Dr Palmer said that the human cost of the status quo is unacceptable.

"Much deeper and sustained efforts are required if real reform and lasting change is to be achieved," said Dr Palmer.

UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little said that for actual progress to occur, there would need to be some fundamental changes in policy and practice.

"Important inroads have been made over the past year in the decision-making structures and processes regarding Closing the Gap, and we commend the shift in the way governments are working with First Peoples," said Ms Little.

"The formal agreement with the Coalition of Peaks and the Federal Government's support for the Priority Reforms they have developed is a positive step, but meaningful and

lasting change will require translating the priorities identified by First Peoples into tangible and properly funded actions.”

“If we are going to bridge the gaps in outcomes, it is vital the Federal Government works with First Peoples in a genuine partnership across all key areas of policy, including health, justice, employment, housing, disability, and children and families.

Dr Palmer said: “While we welcome the Prime Minister’s commitment to “do things differently” and based on a “true partnership” with First Peoples, there appears to be a continuing reliance on top-down measures in other areas of policy making, such as the proposed expansion of the cashless debit card, the Government’s refusal to contemplate a Voice to Parliament, and the continuation of punitive interventions that disproportionately target unemployed First Peoples in remote areas, such as the Community Development Program.

“After more than ten years of Closing the Gap, it is time to turn rhetoric into real action that empowers First Peoples and delivers lasting benefits,” said Dr Palmer.

Dr Palmer made her remarks after attending a cultural gathering at the UAICC’s Leprena Centre in Glenorchy, Tasmania which immerses local Indigenous young people in a culturally safe environment.

Centre Manager Alison Overeem cites “a lack of cultural support” as the main barrier to educational engagement in the mainstream school system.

“We’ve proven at Leprena that with a focus on cultural curriculum, personal growth, wellness and mental health support our young people will stay on till Year 12 and be ready to engage with the workforce or further education,” said Ms Overeem.

**[ENDS]**

*UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church’s community services network in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people each year across urban, rural and remote communities.*

*The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress consists of Aboriginal and Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia and members in fellowship.*

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