The Territory Government today signed a 1997 National Communiqué to confirm its commitment to reducing the over-representation of the Indigenous people in all stages of the criminal justice system at a ceremony at Parliament House. The Communiqué commits the Martin Government to working in partnership with Indigenous people.

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice Dr Peter Toyne said given the Territory has proportionally the highest Indigenous population in Australia the signing represents a significant step forward.

"Signing the 1997 Communiqué is more than symbolic as it commits the government to actively working in partnership with Indigenous people to develop Indigenous justice action plans, examine the role of customary law in the justice system and the need for general law reform," he said.

Objectives of the action plans include:

- Preventing crime and improving community safety
- Addressing the underlying social, economic and cultural issues like housing, education, employment, community development and participation in the mainstream economic activity
- Law reform
- Customary Law
- Looking at funding arrangements
- Improving access to justice relates services, including services for victims of crime
- Improving access to diversionary programs, community based sentencing options and non-custodial sentencing options
- Increasing the rate of participation of Indigenous people in the administration of the justice system

"The signing today removes a stain from the history of the Territory, some five years after the governments of all colours in the rest of Australia took affirmative action to address underlying social, economic, cultural and justice issues faced by Indigenous Australians.

"A great deal of work is already underway across Government, with the signing today heralding further work and commitment to building collaborative partnerships between Government and Indigenous people for the advancement of all Territorians," Dr Toyne said.

In signing the communiqué Dr Toyne was joined by:

- John Ah Kit, Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Indigenous Affairs,
- Tauto Sansbury, Chairman of the National Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee,
- Eddie Taylor, Former Chairman of the NT Committee (and signatory to the 1997 agreement), and
- Doug Walker, current Chairman of the NT Aboriginal Justice Advocacy Committee.