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THE
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Government must act on sexual violence against international students

Leading advocates on university sexual violence **End Rape on Campus Australia, Fair Agenda, National Union of Students** and **The Hunting Ground Australia Project** have today expressed concern about revelations in Al Jazeera's documentary *Australia: Rape on Campus*, saying it is further evidence that universities aren't doing enough to provide safe learning environments and that the Australian Government needs to urgently intervene to ensure student safety.

The four groups have backed the concerns of the international students interviewed in the documentary about inadequate information and support provided to international students regarding sexual violence.

"Data released by the Australian Human Rights Commission last August showed that sexual violence is a huge issue in university contexts, and we know from the Commission's report that international students face additional challenges that can make them more vulnerable.

"What we hear from international students is that they may not understand what behaviour is the result of cultural differences, or when someone is acting predatorily towards them; they may not understand their legal rights to pursue charges; and they often don't have the social supports around them that are so vital to recovering from trauma and violence," said Sharna Bremner, End Rape on Campus Australia.

"I've been working with international students for the past seven years. Unfortunately the experiences of the students in the documentary are all too familiar. Students just aren't given the information they need on this issue." said Ms Bremner.

"I've supported students who are scared that they could be charged if they reported to police; others who've been threatened by the perpetrators that if they report they will have their visa cancelled; and students who have reported, but were told there was nothing the university could do." she added.

"International students in Australia need to be supported with targeted information, including orientation programs covering sexual violence and Australian cultural behaviours, and specific support services that recognise and address their particular vulnerabilities," said Ms Maria Dimopoulos, the independent Chair of the Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change.

“Universities are aggressively recruiting students to come here from overseas; but they’re not doing what it takes to make sure they’re safe once they get here.” Kate Crossin, National Women’s Officer, National Union of Students.

“Universities should be aware of the additional vulnerabilities and challenges faced by international students. They should be ensuring international students are receiving adequate information, specialised prevention training, and that international students are involved in and represented in university responses to sexual violence,” added Ms Crossin.

“The ongoing revelations about sexual violence and appalling behaviour in our universities demonstrate that this is a systemic and ingrained problem.” said Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda.

“We can’t keep relying on the bravery of individual survivors to come forward and speak out in order to drive overdue change. This documentary demonstrates, again, the urgency for the Federal Government to step in and ensure the safety of Australian and international students at our universities.” said Ms Carr.

The four groups reiterated their joint call for the Federal Government to establish an independent expert led Taskforce to investigate and hold universities to account on the systemic issue of sexual violence.

“Students, survivors and advocates have been speaking out about sexual violence for decades. Universities said they would act on sexual violence in response to last year’s national student survey results, but we know many are still dragging their feet on implementing substantive change. And revelations from students attending this year’s O’Week show that universities still aren’t adequately addressing major risks.”said Allison Henry, Campaign Director of The Hunting Ground Australia Project.

“The Federal Government is happy to promote record-breaking numbers of international students¹ and provides universities with at least \$17 billion of Australian taxpayer funding annually² – it’s past time that the Government held universities accountable on this ongoing, systemic issue of student wellbeing and safety,” Ms Henry added.

Available for comment:

- Sharna Bremner, Director of End Rape on Campus Australia, 0401 026 249
- Kate Crossin, National Women’s Officer, National Union of Students, 0447 193 891
- Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda, 0435 597 976
- Allison Henry, Campaign Director of The Hunting Ground Australia Project, 0410 690 910

¹ See <https://www.senatorbirmingham.com.au/international-education-continues-record-breaking-run/>

² See <https://www.senatorbirmingham.com.au/sustainability-and-excellence-in-higher-education/>

Fast facts

The *Change the Course* report from the Australian Human Rights Commission found:

- 5.1% of international students were sexually assaulted in 2015 and/or 2016, and 1.4% experienced this in a university setting (p.51)
- 33% of international students who were sexually assaulted indicated they did not know who to report their sexual assault to (p.130)
- International students who were sexually assaulted were more likely (31%) than domestic students (19%) to indicate that they felt too embarrassed or ashamed to report it (p.130)
- International students are almost half as likely as domestic students (5% compared to 9%) to report their experience of sexual assault to the university (p.136)