

Jail term angers black women

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INDIGENOUS women are calling for traditional Aboriginal law to be changed to prevent it from being used to justify the sexual abuse of girls.

It follows a judge's decision to sentence an Aboriginal elder to one month's jail for having anal sex with a 14-year-old girl who was promised to him as a wife when she was only four.

Leading indigenous academic Boni Robertson said yesterday the Northern Territory case was a disgrace and "no deterrent whatever" to men who thought they could violate women.

Ms Robertson, who headed a 1998 inquiry into violence in indigenous communities in Queensland, said the 55-year-old man, who pleaded guilty to the offence, should be sentenced to a much longer jail term.

"How many times have our women to be rejected by the courts — to have horrendous crimes committed against them — with the perpetrators claiming it is their cultural right?" Ms Robertson asked.

"Nobody has a right to violate a young girl, physically or sexually. This man knew he was doing wrong and he should be sentenced appropriately."

"The judge has made a mockery of the work done by men and women in recent years to get justice for indigenous women and children who become victims of violence in the name of culture. This is an absolute disgrace."

The man, from a remote Northern Territory community, had been promised the teenager as a wife under tribal law. After rumours in the community that the teenager might have had sex with her boyfriend, the man struck her with a boomerang before forcing her to have sex.

In sentencing the man, Territory Supreme Court Chief Justice Brian Martin said he had a great deal of sympathy for the offender and the difficulties he had moving between traditional culture and Territory law.

NSW Labor MP and senior indigenous figure Linda Burney said traditional Aboriginal law needed to change and respect fundamental human rights principles.

"I don't think it's right. I think traditional Aboriginal law is something to be respected but young Aboriginal women have human rights too and I have real problems with traditional law being used as a justification for underage sex. And when it comes to forcing women to have sex, there's only one word and

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