

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

CC: Attorney-General, Robert McClelland

By Fax: 02 6271 5414



26 August 2008

Dear Prime Minister

Consultation into the Legal Recognition and Protection of Human Rights in Australia

The Australian Human Rights Group welcomes and strongly supports your Government's commitment to the legal recognition and greater protection of human rights, especially as we approach the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

The ALP National Platform commits the Government to a national public consultation regarding the recognition and protection of human rights and continues the proud and important legacy of the ALP's own Dr HV ("Doc") Evatt in introducing the *Universal Declaration* to the UN General Assembly in 1948. We welcome your Government's allocation of substantial funds for the consultation in the 2008-09 Budget.

We represent organisations from many different parts of the Australian community and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the better protection of the human rights of all Australians through a national consultation. This letter has also been endorsed by over 50 organisations.

Australia remains the only democratic country without a national human rights law. Many countries with a shared history and similar values to Australia, including the United Kingdom and New Zealand, have improved their legislative protection of human rights in a way that has enhanced basic democratic values, improved public policy and services and maintained the sovereignty of Parliament. In Australia, Victoria and the ACT have now enacted human rights legislation to this effect, and community-based reports in Tasmania and Western Australia have recommended the same outcome.

The federal consultation should be open and fair in ensuring that all Australians are given the opportunity to participate in and make a submission to the consultation, including those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. The consultation should identify what human rights need to be protected and how this might best occur.

The panel undertaking the inquiry should include people from different walks of life and be independent of parliament and the government. The panel should include people with substantial and practical human rights expertise.

The successful 2020 Summit you convened strongly supported a national consultation as well as the enactment of a national charter of rights. It is time that all Australians are given the opportunity to have their say to an independent and national consultation on our human rights.

We look forward to the commencement of the inquiry by the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration* on 10 December 2008.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Ryan'.

Susan Ryan AO, Chair, Australian Human Rights Group

Endorsed by:

Organisations

Uniting Church in Australia
Music Council of Australia
National Association for the Visual Arts
Arts Industry Council of South Australia
National Association of Community Legal Centres
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
Amnesty International
Civil Liberties Australia
Victorian Council of Social Service
NSW Council of Social Service
Women's Legal Centre ACT & Region
Women's Legal Services Australia
National Children's and Youth Law Centre
Australian Lawyers Alliance
Mental Health Law Centre, Victoria
Indigenous Family Violence Legal Outreach Unit, North Queensland
Action for Community Living Inc.
People with Disability Australia (PWD)
ACT Disability Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS)
Youthlaw, Victoria
Australian Marriage Equality (AME)
Castan Centre for Human Rights Law
Caxton Legal Centre Inc, Queensland
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
Combined Community Legal Centres Group, NSW
Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc
GetUp!
Peel Community Legal Centre, WA
PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic
Redfern Legal Centre, NSW
Kingsford Legal Centre, NSW
Darebin Community Legal Centre, Victoria
Women's Legal Services NSW
Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group
Australian Coalition for Equality
Human Rights Act for Australia Inc.
A Just Australia
Just Rights Queensland
Human Rights Council for Australia
Human Rights Law Resource Centre
InPsight
Just Peace
ACT Human Rights Act Research Project, ANU
NSW Charter Group
Just Fair Treatment
NSW Council for Civil Liberties
Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), NSW
Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH), Victoria
Human Rights Coalition Inc
Queensland Advocacy Inc
Queensland Council for Civil Liberties Inc
Queensland Health Consumers Network
Save the Children

Youth Coalition of the ACT Inc
SCALES
Liberty Victoria
Human Rights Arts and Film Festival
Community Cultural Development NSW
Australian Network for Art and Technology
Australian Council of Social Service
National Committee of Human Rights Education
Australian Centre for Human Rights Education
Australian Performing Arts Centres Association

Individuals

Fred Chaney, former Chair, Consultation Committee for a Proposed WA Human Rights Act
Prof. Larissa Behrendt, Director of Research, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, UTS
Prof. Simon Rice OAM, Director, Law Reform and Social Justice, ANU
Rodney Croome AM
Prof. George Williams, Foundation Director, Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law
Dr Julie Debeljak, Deputy Director, Castan Centre for Human Rights Law
Dr Sev Ozdowski OAM, Human Rights & Disability Discrimination Commissioners (2000-05)
James Dunn, foundation president of Human Rights Council of Australia
Adjunct Professor Margaret Reynolds
Professor Sarah Joseph, Professor of Human Rights Law, Monash University
Doug Pender
Dr. Ben Saul, Director, Sydney Centre for International Law
Ed Santow, UNSW
John Stannard, Principal solicitor, Welfare Rights Centre Inc, Queensland
Margherita Tracanelli
Simeon Beckett, NSW Bar