

## **Day Three of Public Hearings**

### **Session: Developing a culture of Human Rights: education, public awareness and active citizenship**

#### **Presentation from Claire Mallinson, National Director, Amnesty International**

I was delighted at the opportunity to participate in the public hearings on behalf of Amnesty International Australia's 80,000 supporters.

With an estimated 40,000 written submissions and attendance at community roundtables across the country, the National Consultation has once and for all put an end to the myth that only lawyers, activists and academics care about human rights. In fact the resounding call from the 10,600 people who sent us their submissions is the call for better human rights protection in Australia. This support was also reflected in an opinion poll commissioned by Amnesty International earlier this year, which revealed that 81% of people polled supported the introduction of a law to protect human rights and 85% of those believed it should either be a high or very high priority.

The substantial majority of those polled and the authors of the 10,600 submissions share a common vision, a vision for a just and fair Australia. To assist in achieving this vision Amnesty International made three recommendations to the National Human Rights Consultation Committee:

- **Firstly:** The Australian Government should introduce a Human Rights Act. History shows that self regulation is not the best method and a “we’ll be right mate” approach does not protect the most vulnerable people in Australia
- **Secondly:** The Human Rights Act should include the protection and promotion of **all** rights for **all people** . Economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, should be included, as human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.
- **Thirdly:** A Human Rights Act must establish effective independent systems, institutions and means of accountability. This needs to include appropriate and accessible ways of preventing human rights violations and addressing breaches.

Human rights are about ensuring that all people have their rights protected and they are treated with dignity. A Human Rights Act will provide a vital safeguard for members of the community who, are the most vulnerable, the most at risk and the least likely to have their voices heard.

Thousands of people from across Australia told us with great passion that they want a fair go. Here is what just some of those wrote:

- Michael from South Gippsland *“Adopt the human rights act, weave it into the fabric of our society across the land, stand by and promote it. Let us set an example for the whole world!”*
- Clarissa from Queensland *“If it’s not in an act – it’s just words we can ignore”*
- Patrick from Victoria *“Legal options ensure that I and my family have an avenue for appeal and for protection against unforeseen hardships”*

- Sahil from a school in Melbourne: *“People deserve a fair go in every aspect of life.”*
- Nabib from Coffs Harbour: *“I don't want to just hope or assume that my rights are protected , I want to know that there is a law to back this up and that I have an avenue if my rights are not respected.”*
- Sabina from Adelaide: *“Respect, remedy, responsibility. Without basic foundational factors nothing else can get done.”*

Education and training without a human rights act is not enough. Legislative scrutiny without oversight is inadequate. A law without avenues for dealing with breaches is insufficient. An act without ALL rights and ALL people protected is unacceptable. We have a historic opportunity right now to create a fairer and more equal society. Dignity, respect, freedom, equality and justice for all is the Australia, that Australians want. A Human Rights Act is a key step forward.

Let's do it and Let's Do it Now