



**ATTORNEY-GENERAL
HON ROBERT McCLELLAND MP**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

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Mr Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to update the House on Australia's appearance at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva for its first Universal Periodic Review on 27 January 2011.

The Universal Periodic Review was established in 2006 to create a regular process of review for all countries who are members of the UN to ensure they comply with their international human rights obligations.

This Government firmly believes that a nation that respects fundamental human rights is a nation that is safer, more resilient, productive and stable. Australia was an active participant in negotiations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundation for the standards of human rights and freedoms around the world. Since then, Australia has engaged actively in the development of international human rights treaties. Australia's first appearance under the Universal Periodic Review marks another significant moment in Australia's history of promoting human rights at the international level.

The Australian delegation was led by Senator the Hon Kate Lundy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and included Australia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Mr Peter Woolcott, as well as senior Australian Government officials.

I had hoped to lead the Australian delegation, but was unable to do so due to my responsibilities for emergency management and the unprecedented floods crisis across Australia.

Australia's appearance at the Human Rights Council was an excellent opportunity to discuss our strong human rights record. Since Labor was elected in 2007, we have taken significant action on human rights, including:

- becoming a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol;
- acceding the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women;

- signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture;
- giving support to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and
- issuing a standing invitation to Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council to visit Australia.

We have also taken steps to implement our obligations in legislation such as recent amendments passed by the Parliament to introduce a specific Commonwealth offence of torture and to prevent the death penalty from being introduced anywhere in Australia in the future.

The Australian delegation was also able to inform the Council of key elements of Australia's Human Rights Framework, which I launched last year. This includes:

- legislation currently before the Senate to improve parliamentary scrutiny of human rights considerations in new legislation, including a new Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights;
- consolidating federal anti-discrimination laws into a single Act;
- investing more than \$12 million in a comprehensive suite of education initiatives to promote a greater understanding of human rights across the community; and
- creating an annual NGO Human Rights Forum – of which the inaugural forum has already been held - to enable comprehensive engagement with non-government organisations.

A number of countries at the Human Rights Council made the specific point of praising the Government's Human Rights Framework initiative.

During the interactive session, 53 countries asked questions of and made recommendations to Australia. Australia received 145 recommendations. Issues raised included international human rights treaties, domestic implementation of human rights obligations, the rights of Indigenous peoples, the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, our counter-terrorism laws, the rights of persons with disabilities and the rights of women and children.

The Universal Periodic Review is an important opportunity to reflect on progress we have made and to renew our determination that in the fields of human rights, equality and opportunity, we can always achieve more. During the Review, we announced a number of new commitments in the area of human rights, including:

- funding to restore a separate full-time Race Discrimination Commissioner in the Australian Human Rights Commission, in addition to funding recently committed to a full-time Age Discrimination Commissioner. This will significantly increase the Commission's capacity, providing six full time Commissioners in total; and
- providing \$2.35 million to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights through AusAID's Human Rights Fund to help promote human rights, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, in addition to \$650,000 for the Asia Pacific Forum to help establish and strengthen human rights institutions in the region.

We also committed to increasing Australia's monitoring of our international human rights obligations domestically by:

- tabling in Parliament all concluding observations made by UN treaty bodies to Australia, as well as recommendations made to Australia in the Universal Periodic Review;
- establishing a systematic process for the regular review of Australia's reservations to international human rights treaties;
- establishing a publicly accessible, online database of recommendations from the UN human rights system, including recommendations made by UN human rights treaty bodies to Australia as well as recommendations made to Australia in the Universal Periodic Review; and
- using the recommendations made during the Universal Periodic Review and accepted by Australia to inform the development of Australia's new National Human Rights Action Plan.

More information on Australia's appearance can be found at <http://www.ag.gov.au/upr>.

Mr Speaker, this Government is committed to a fairer and more inclusive Australia, where everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in the economic, political and social life of our nation. The Government welcomes the opportunity to engage with the international community on these important issues.

I table the draft report of the Working Group on Australia's Universal Periodic Review, which includes the 145 recommendations made by the Working Group of the Human Rights Council. In consultation with States and Territories, the Australian Human Rights Commission and non-government organisations, the Government will now give consideration to the range of recommendations made and respond to the Council in the coming months.