



**Joint NGO statement  
Item 6, 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council  
June 2014**

Thank you Mr. President

This statement is made on behalf of a number of Australian NGOs.<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, the Human Rights Council reviewed Australia under the Universal Periodic Review. At the time, NGOs welcomed the Australian government's acceptance of a large number of UPR recommendations and its commitment to translate them into practical action.

Unfortunately, three years later, serious violations continue to blight Australia's human rights record and we have witnessed further regression in key areas.

Australia's treatment of asylum seekers is increasingly harsh and punitive. All maritime arrivals to Australia are subject to mandatory and indefinite detention on Nauru or Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, in conditions the UNHCR has assessed as falling well short of international human rights standards. In addition to mistreating those who arrive, Australia also actively prevents others from coming. The Australian Navy is intercepting boats on the high seas and towing them back towards Indonesia, which is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention. Australia has also gifted patrol boats to the Sri Lankan Government to help it block asylum seekers from leaving.

The Federal Government has released draft legislation proposing to significantly weaken long standing legal protections against racial vilification, causing significant community concern particularly among Indigenous peoples and Australia's many multicultural communities. The introduction of extremely broad exemptions will effectively render any remaining protections against racial vilification and hate speech meaningless.

Aboriginal legal and justice services have been stripped of critical funding, despite the continue crisis in incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

NGOs are also concerned about threats to the funding and effective operation of Australia's National Human Rights Institution, following the recent withdrawal of funding for a standalone Disability Discrimination Commissioner. This comes despite the fact that disability discrimination complaints make up the largest proportion of complaints to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

While there were a number of positive actions taken by the Australian Government in response to the UPR recommendations in 2011, it is now unclear whether sustained implementation of the remaining recommendations continues.

We recommend that Australia urgently address the concerns outlined above in the lead up to its universal periodic review by the Council in 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Law Centre, National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc and Edmund Rice International.