

NGO statement
Item 6

30thth session of the Human Rights Council – September 2015

Thank you Mr. President

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

Australia's second review is due to take place in November this year and despite some positive steps, including an important boost to family violence services announced this week, implementation of many recommendations has stalled or not progressed and Australia's strong human rights record is being diminished by serious violations and regression in key areas.

While we welcome the recent announcement that Australia would accept 12,000 additional Syrian refugees, this generosity does not lessen or address the injustice Australia inflicts on many other groups of asylum seekers, particularly those who have had the misfortune to arrive in Australia by boat.

Australia maintains a policy of mandatory immigration detention for all people who arrive by boat. As a result, over 1700 asylum seekers, including children, continue to languish in inhuman conditions in the Australian run and funded detention centres on Nauru and Papua New Guinea. New laws give the Government the express power to disregard Australia's non-refoulement obligations when returning asylum seekers intercepted at sea, limit merits review of claims, and reduce accountability, with the imposition of criminal penalties for whistle-blowers.

Indeed, basic democratic freedoms are being eroded at both the federal and state level. Anti-protest laws have been introduced to state parliaments, steps taken by governments to restrict advocacy by NGOs, and the independence and functioning of the Australian Human Rights Commission has been diminished by significant budgetary cuts and personal attacks on the Commission's President. These attacks are manifestly incompatible Australia's calls to strengthen and enhance the role of NRHIs through its leadership of resolution 27/18 earlier this year.

Our hope is that Australia will work constructively with states in its upcoming Universal Periodic Review and match its statements of support for human rights with principled leadership and renewed action back home in Australia.

We urge states to raise these important issues with Australia in its upcoming Universal Periodic Review in November.

Thank you.