



Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee

WATCHING BRIEF 20-1: UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 42ND SESSION 9-27 SEPTEMBER 2019

As a member of the UNHRC, Australia made several national statements, general comments and other representations. Such statements have a strict word limit of some 250 words, to enable many countries to speak. QPLC brings to Friends' attention a few Australian representations which may be of particular interest.

National Statement – Contemporary forms of slavery 090919

Australia called for systematic responses that addresses underlying inequalities in societies, commerce and law enforcement which disproportionately impact women and girls. Under Australia's *Modern Slavery Act*, some 3,000 large companies, charities and other entities will report annual on action to address modern slavery risks in their global operations and supply chains. In a world first, the Australian Government will also report. Regionally, Australia works with governments, the private sector and civil society to implement the Bali Process Government and Business Forum's *Acknowledge, Act and Advance* recommendations to improve supply chain transparency and ethical recruitment and employment.

National Statement – Rights of older persons

Australia recognized that older persons' experiences of disasters and humanitarian crises can be different to other groups in their communities and can be compounded when combined with other potential vulnerabilities or inequities. At the same time, older persons can also bring a wealth of experience, knowledge and influence to such situations. Australia expects humanitarian agencies to be accountable to the people they are assisting, including by ensuring participation of older people in decisions affecting the assistance they receive.

National Statement – Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic 170919

Australia condemned unequivocally all violations of international humanitarian law and all violations and abuses of human rights in Syria. It is unacceptable that an estimated 98,000 persons have been forcibly disappeared in Syria since March 2011. Australia expressed deep concern of continuing reports of sexual and gender-based violence and urges the regime to release any arbitrarily detained persons.

National Statement – Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Issues and Expert Mechanism of the Rights of Indigenous People 180919

Australia highlighted the information it provided on the Children's Koori Court in Victoria which incorporates cultural practices into legal proceedings and identifies alternative sentencing options with community elders. Australia is also trialing a transition program for youth leaving detention, supporting young Indigenous people to return to their families and communities safely. Addressing the underlying causes of the overrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in the justice system is also recognized.

National Statement – Integration of a gender perspective throughout the HRC (annual discussion)

Australia recognizes that progress on gender mainstreaming takes innovation and commitment. Australia's Workplace Gender Equality Agency, established in 2012, promotes and improves general equality in Australian workplaces. In 2019, the Agency reported that nearly 75% of Australian employers have a gender equality policy. In April 2018, the Government achieved gender parity at the most senior level of the public service, which half of all departmental Secretary roles held by women. (Of the five departmental secretaries who lost their jobs in the December 2019 Machinery of Government change,

three are women. At the same time, the new director-general of the Australian Signals Directorate is Rachel Noble, the first woman to lead a major intelligence agency.) 40% of senior managers in DFAT are women as are 40% of Heads of Australian Missions and Posts.

Joint statement – Addressing xenophobia and hate speech 240919

Concern was expressed about the proliferation of hate speech which can push potential perpetrators to carry out violent acts. Hate crimes threaten democratic values and social stability, endanger peace and the sustainable development of the effective enjoyment of human rights. While respecting freedom of expression, we reject any rhetoric that feeds into a climate of hatred where discrimination, racism, xenophobia and intolerance are normalised. Support was expressed for the Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech launched by the UN Secretary General.

General Comment on Resolution of the Death Penalty 270919

Australia reiterated its opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances for all people, and recommitted to global abolition of it. Abolition is a human rights issue, which goes beyond questions of national laws or sovereignty.

Minister for Indigenous Australians addressed Council 180919

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP addressed the UNHRC and participated in a Panel Discussion on Indigenous Languages as 2019 was the International Year of Indigenous Languages. Speaking one's own language is a fundamental right, as is using it to express your identity, culture and history. Only half of the roughly 250 original Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are still spoken today. Of these, only 13 are considered strong, making Australia one of the world's top five hot spots for endangered languages. The Government is partnering with Indigenous Australians to revitalize languages that are in danger.

Nationally, a variety of technology is being used to provide a range of content in language. IndigTUBE,, with Government funding, is becoming a repository for a range of content as well as music videos, documentaries and comedy. Australia also has over 20 Indigenous community-led language and arts centres.

The Government's Indigenous Procurement Policy, which started four years ago, has seen over 16,280 contracts, worth over \$2.47 billion, awarded to 1,780 indigenous businesses across a variety of sectors. A 10-year plan is improving access to business and financial support to Indigenous businesses. Recognising that Indigenous women may have additional challenges setting up businesses, the first Indigenous Women's Leadership Symposium was held in October 2019, providing opportunities to share experiences, network and develop leadership skills.

43th Session – 24 February to 20 March 2020.

QPLC will monitor Australia's participation

Friends' Action

In 2020, Australia is due to report on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This peer-review process of the UNHRC considers the human rights record of each UN Member State every five years. The Review is by UN Members and covers a range of international human rights obligations, and is led by committees of experts and focus on specific treaties.

QPLC is engaging in opportunities for civil society participation in this processes and monitoring events. In 2015, some 200 organisations contributed to a compiled Non-Government Organisation report.

Please let us know if you hear of any opportunities in your state or territory.