

Human Rights Council – 13th Regular Session

Australian national statement

Mr President

The protection and promotion of human rights is a paramount obligation of each and every State. Australia today reaffirms its commitment to human rights.

We welcome progress where it has been made in various parts of the world. The creation of the first regional human rights mechanism in the Asia-Pacific – the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights – is a positive development. We applaud Mongolia's abolition of the death penalty.

Australia, too, has made progress over the last year. We continue to place a high priority on resetting the relationship, and closing the gap in life outcomes, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The establishment of a *National Congress of Australia's First Peoples* will be an important step in developing the partnerships necessary to achieve these goals. Australia was also pleased to announce its support for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in April 2009.

In 2008 Australia launched the most extensive human rights consultation in our history, allowing Australians from all walks of life to give their views on how we can best promote and protect human rights. The Government is giving serious consideration to the recommendations of the National Human Rights Consultation Committee and will respond in the coming months.

Mr President

Australia welcomes international scrutiny of its human rights record as a means to improve our implementation of human rights where we can. No country has a perfect human rights record – we all stand to benefit from constructive engagement with the UN human rights system.

In this spirit, Australia signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture in July 2009, and welcomed the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in March 2009.

Australia also recently hosted visits by the Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples and the Special Rapporteur on health. The work of Special Rapporteurs is crucial to the Council's effectiveness, and Australia reiterates its support for the work of Special Procedures mandate-holders.

As we begin preparations for Australia's Universal Periodic Review appearance in February 2011, we are encouraged by the example set by those states that have taken a constructive approach to their review: genuinely reflecting on how they might do better, embracing the participation of civil society, and accepting and acting on constructive recommendations made by others.

Australia looks forward to its review, and to carrying out preparations over the next year in close consultation with the Australian Human Rights Commission and civil society.

Mr President

Australia wants the Human Rights Council to be as effective as it can in protecting and promoting human rights. The upcoming review is an opportunity to reflect on the successes and challenges of the Council's work, and to ensure it can better serve the human rights of all. Australia looks forward to engaging with other delegations on the review in the coming months.