

Human Rights Council – 38th Session

Joint Statement on the plurality of families and protecting individual rights

Thank you Mr Vice President. Australia has the privilege to deliver this statement on the plurality of families and protecting individual rights on behalf of a group of states, with a full list to be placed on the extranet.

As the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights notes: “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.”¹

In different political, social and cultural systems, various forms of the family exist. Families can be structured in many ways, and diverse forms of ‘the family’ should be equally recognised and protected. This includes, inter alia, heteronormative families, female-headed households, single parent families, LGBTI families, indigenous kinship groups, grandparent-headed households, and multigenerational and extended families.

We recognise that families play an important role in empowering individuals, including children, to realise their human rights. At the same time, it is critical that the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of all family members are respected and protected.

We must not downplay the risk of human rights abuses occurring or condoned within families, including for example sexual and gender-based violence, violence against children, and elder abuse. In this regard, we reaffirm that individuals are rights holders and underline that it is the obligation of States to promote, protect and fulfil human rights of all individuals without discrimination.

As UN Secretary General, Ban ki-Moon noted in 2012 “no one gets to decide who is entitled to human rights and who is not.”² All human beings – not some, not most, but all – are entitled to protection, regardless of the composition of their family.

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¹ ICCPR Article 23(1)

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/17/un-ban-ki-moon-condemns-homophobic-laws>