

Government overlooks key rights recommendations

The Law Council has expressed disappointment at the Government's decision not to enact a Human Rights Act, despite the findings of the National Human Rights Consultation that comprehensive legislative protection for human rights is currently lacking at the federal level.

Attorney-General Robert McClelland announced today the Government would not be introducing a Human Rights Act and would instead implement a Human Rights Framework aimed at protecting the rights of Australians.

Some of the framework measures include the introduction of a National Human Rights Awareness and Education Plan and the review of all federal anti-discrimination laws.

The framework will also see the introduction of a new Human Rights Action Plan and human rights compliance requirements for the Australian Public Service.

Law Council President Glenn Ferguson said while any initiatives aimed at rights protection would be welcomed, it was very disappointing the Government had chosen to ignore important recommendations made in the National Human Rights Consultation Report.

"The National Consultation Report identified significant gaps in Australia's rights protection system and made over thirty recommendations for reform," Mr Ferguson said.

"While any measures designed to address this gap in protection are positive, the Government's decision to steer clear of implementing a Human Rights Act means we will continue to lack a comprehensive legal framework to protect the basic rights of all Australians," he said.

"While many Australians enjoy a high standard of living and the security that comes from living in a stable democracy, there are others who regularly experience fear, hunger, homelessness, powerlessness and discrimination."

"For these people, lack of adequate human rights protection affects their ability to be free from arbitrary detention, to be treated equally before the law and to be treated with dignity and respect in the community," he said.

The Law Council has long argued that a Federal Human Rights Act is the most effective way to ensure the rights of all Australians are adequately protected.

This view received strong support from many different voices in the Australian community and was included as a recommendation in the National Consultation Report.

"The Law Council is disappointed with the Government's decision and we will continue to speak out in favour of a Human Rights Act as the best way to provide adequate rights protection for all citizens," Mr Ferguson said.

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