



Australian Government



# Human Rights

Submission to the National Human Rights Consultation

April 2009

## **Submission to the National Human Rights Consultation from Australian Youth Forum Website Users**

This submission to the National Human Rights Consultation is made on behalf of young Australians who contributed their thoughts and opinions through the Australian Youth Forum (AYF) website.

The AYF was launched in October 2008 by the Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Youth, to give young Australians the chance to continually engage with the Australian Government about current important issues. The AYF is a new approach to youth engagement. Its two main aims are widespread youth engagement around the country and meaningful and ongoing engagement with the youth sector.

The AYF implementation is guided by the AYF Steering Committee consisting of 11 young people directly involved in decisions about the AYF activities and directions. More information on the AYF can be found at [www.youth.gov.au/ayf](http://www.youth.gov.au/ayf).

On 16 January 2009, at the request of website users, an online discussion board on Human Rights opened on the AYF website, to give young people the opportunity to put forward their ideas. At the same time, a commitment was made that the ideas and thoughts submitted through this online discussion would be compiled and presented as a submission from the youth of Australia to the National Human Rights Consultation.

In the two months that the discussion board was active on the AYF website it received 45 posts and over 600 votes from young people. This submission contains a summary of their ideas and suggestions, which have been grouped under the three main consultation questions, and a copy of all posts, as they were submitted through the website.

## **Summary of posts submitted by the Australian Youth Forum website users**

### **Which human rights and responsibilities should be protected and promoted?**

- The right to equality for young people under 18 years of age.
  - A few young people expressed that there should be equal rights for 'minor's' and adults, and that if this was the case that young people would step up and take responsibility.
  - One young person also commented on the issue of young drivers, and stated that there should be equal rights and responsibilities for all drivers.
- The right to practice your chosen religion, and the responsibility to respect other peoples beliefs.
- The right to equality, regardless of gender.
- Equality regardless of race or cultural background.
  - People should not be judged or discriminated against because of their skin colour or culture.
  - Australia is a multi-cultural country and all citizens deserve to be treated equally and have the right to call themselves Australian's.
- Equal opportunities for people with disability
- People should not be discriminated against because of their age
- The right to choose, and feel safe with your choices in regards to sexual orientation.
- The right to have access to food and water.
- The right to feel safe.
- The right to adequate housing.
- The right to an education, and equal opportunities across educational systems.
- The right to privacy.

### **Are human rights sufficiently protected and promoted?**

- No. Through one young persons experience working at a women's support and information centre she has seen first hand how many Australians have no one to validate or support their basic human rights.
  - Seeing women whose rights have been violated by a domestic violence system that is not pre-emptive or supportive enough to allow these women piece of mind that they do not have to live with abuse.
  - Seeing women whose right to a safe place to live is ignored when they are put on a seven year waiting list to get into public housing, so they are forced to couch surf or live in their cars.
  - Women with physical and mental disabilities who are denied assistance to help them with basic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing.

## How could Australia better protect and promote human rights?

- *Funded residential healing programs for victims of abuse*
  - Have appropriately funded residential healing programs for people who have suffered abuse to give them a chance to recover and live a happy and normal life.
- *Focus on the 'bigger picture' - human rights internationally*
  - Include a focus on human rights internationally – a young person suggested that Australians are very good at pulling together when we need to help out fellow Aussies (for example with the recent Victorian bushfires) however, it appears there is not the same commitment for other countries who face major obstacles, such as the massive statistics on HIV and AIDS in Africa.
  - Diminish the duplicity that exists with international affairs. For many years a blind eye has been turned on atrocities committed by countries that are our allies, yet when small scale incidents occur in poor countries we criticise. We need to be more vocal and impartial on these issues.
- *Equal rights for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*
  - Australia maintains separate laws for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and in effect, this can deny many Indigenous people access to healthcare, education employment opportunities, and choice. They are instead effectively allowed self governance and granted free land. With almost no expenses there is almost no impetus to go to higher education, to look for a job or to better one's self. The segregation of Australia's system needs to end. Indigenous people are in no way inferior to anyone else and should be able to function in today's society. Of course they should be offered assistance finding jobs and getting education, but they should be made equal to any other citizen.
- *Include a charter of human rights in the constitution*
  - A charter of human rights is required. However, it must be carefully developed to prevent it becoming either too cumbersome to enforce or leave enough loopholes to entice oppression and tyranny.
  - As the constitution currently only implies rights. It would be hard though as you could say that almost any action by another person can in some way conflict with another persons human rights.
  - A charter of human rights should protect those that are disadvantaged, marginalised or in the minority and protect these people from the will of the majority, but at the same time not force the will of the minority onto the majority.

- A charter of human rights would educate people on their rights and responsibilities in Australian Society.
- *Look at gay rights and a change to policies around same sex coupling and marriage.*
  - People need to be educated on that it is acceptable to be gay and laws should be changed regarding gay marriage etc.
- *Standardise immigrant processing and look at the issue of human rights and conditions in detention centres.*
  - Refugees should be treated the same as we treat our own citizens. We have a justice system based on 'innocent until proven guilty' however when refugees are sent to detention centres it implies a guilt that is to be found out. Whilst we need to have strict laws on numbers of immigrants coming into the country, we should accept refugees into our multicultural nation in a more effective, and accepting way than currently exists.

Other Suggestions:

- *Ensure steps are in place to protect the rights of all living creatures*
  - There needs to be a revolution in the operational practices of the meat farming industry to ensure adequate living environments, stress free transportation and humane slaughter.
  - Policy is also needed to cover rights in regards to animal testing, stud farms, breeding kennels and battery hens.
  - Animals should have the right to live in their natural habitat and there should be harsher penalties for those who abuse animals.
- *Prisons such as Guantanamo Bay should be shut down.*
  - People in these establishments are often being held without charge, and are treated with absolutely no respect to human rights.
  - Many young people agreed with Barack Obama's move to close down this establishment.