



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Australian Government told to improve on human rights

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) welcomes the recommendations made in Geneva overnight by over 100 countries as part of Australia's second "Universal Periodic Review".

The process, also referred to as Australia's human rights scorecard, involves a 4-yearly review of the human rights record of each UN Member State and provides other countries with an opportunity to make recommendations for improvement.

"There were a spread of recommendations for improvement made by other countries to Australia across a range of key areas. However, the very strong message was that the international community is extremely concerned about Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in particular, and those areas were the focus of many of the recommendations" said Amanda Alford, NACLC's Director of Policy and Advocacy.

NACLC, along with the Human Rights Law Centre, has been coordinating engagement in the process by a coalition of almost 200 non-government organisations, including through preparing materials, briefing UN member states prior to the appearance and engaging with the Australian Government.

"Given the work of NACLC and Community Legal Centres as legal services, we were also pleased to see a number of recommendations relating to access to justice. For example, countries recommended the abolition of mandatory sentencing, measures to address over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and ensuring adequate funding of initiative designed to address family violence, as well as highlighting the importance of access to services, including legal assistance," said Ms Alford.

The Australian Government also made a number of voluntary commitments as part of the appearance. "We welcome the commitments made by the Government, including to improve human rights monitoring and reporting, given that only 10% of the recommendations Australia accepted as part of the first UPR were fully implemented, something a number of countries commented upon" said Ms Alford.

*NACLC acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which the NACLC office is situated. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.*

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“There were also a number of other important commitments made by the Government, including to ending discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status, promoting and protecting the rights of older persons internationally, and addressing issues in relation to fitness to plead for people with cognitive disability” added Ms Alford.

“The review made it clear that Australia has significant room to improve in a number of areas. The voluntary commitments and recommendations now provide a solid basis for Australia to look at its record in these areas and commit to making changes moving forward. We welcome the Government’s recognition of the role of non-government organisations and look forward to working constructively with the Government to monitor and implement these important recommendations” concluded Ms Alford.

The full Outcomes Report of Australia’s appearance will be released on Thursday afternoon and Australia will have an opportunity to formally respond in early 2016, indicating whether or not each of the recommendations are accepted.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact NACLC Director Policy & Advocacy Amanda Alford 0421 028 645.

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