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Your excellencies, colleagues, friends.

I am pleased to represent Australia's A status national human rights institution in this pre-sessional briefing.

We place much importance on the UPR process. It provides an opportunity to reflect on how well we have done as a nation over the past 5 years and on how we can do better in protecting human rights into the future.

You have a critical role to play in achieving this, by ensuring that the recommendations that you make to the Australian Government are targeted to the most critical human rights needs in Australia and are well crafted so we can hold the government to account.

We know that achieving this is a challenge in the UPR – and many recommendations are too general or vague, and so don't ultimately have the impact in improving human rights on the ground that we hope for and work hard for.

The Australian Human Rights Commission's report for this UPR has a simple message – for all our achievements on human rights, we can do better. And we *should* do better.

We have made 53 recommendations for action across all areas of life, for all people in Australia.

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Our major focus is on the need to modernise our system of human rights protection. Over the past five years, the Commission conducted a project called [*Free and Equal*](#) in which we developed a national human rights reform agenda.

We encourage actions by the Australian Government to:

- incorporate human rights through a national Human Rights Act
- Modernise our federal discrimination laws
- Introduce a national tracker for human rights progress
- Expand the role of Parliament in overseeing human rights issues
- Better educate people about human rights
- Introduce a national parliamentary statement of human rights priorities; and
- Ensure a robust civil society and Commission to protect human rights.

Our proposed national reform agenda has been the subject of a national inquiry by the Joint Committee on Human Rights in our federal Parliament. In May 2024, that committee released [its final report](#) endorsing the key areas of our proposed national human rights framework.

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So we come to you today with an overarching recommendation that we ask **all governments** to make to Australia in this UPR as follows:

Every Nation State should recommend the introduction of a National Human Rights Framework, including:

- **National Human Rights Act**
- **modernised federal discrimination laws**
- **rights measurement framework**
- **national human rights education plan.**

We ask that you commence with this recommendation, and that you then make additional recommendations on the thematic areas of concern to your country.

We have a clearly defined national reform agenda that the Commission is convinced will improve the human rights protection for every one in Australia.

Each of the measures proposed will address a shortcoming or a lack of accountability in our current system of human rights protection in Australia.

We anticipate that there will also be major focus in Australia's UPR on gender equality, the treatment of our First Nations peoples, racial discrimination and asylum seeker and refugee issues. We have recommendations on each of these areas in our report.

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The Commission is particularly concerned at the stalling of progress in advancing the rights of First Nations peoples since the past UPR:

- Constitutional reform to establish a Voice to Parliament was defeated, and there has been inaction from the government in the 2 years since to ensure that First Nations peoples are able to participate in decisions that affect them and to build better understanding of our history.
- Efforts to close the gap in disadvantage for First Nations communities have also not progressed and key actions to improve government

accountability, such as the establishment of independent monitoring processes have not been advanced.

We are also concerned at regressions at the state and territory level in the criminal justice system – especially on child justice issues. First nations communities are the most affected by these regressions and there remains insufficient progress in reducing rates of over-representation at all stages of the criminal justice process and in deaths in custody.

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The Commission also remains deeply concerned about the rise of racism in Australia in the past five years.

Over several years, the Commission has developed a national anti-racism framework for Australia so that we can better address this scourge. At a national level we have national frameworks, committed to by every government in Australia, to address family violence, child abuse and neglect and First Nations disadvantage. But we don't have such a framework to address racism. This needs to change.

We anticipate that issues of racism against First nations communities, against Jewish and Palestinian peoples, in universities and the community more broadly, and anti-immigration sentiment will receive significant attention in the UPR process in January.

My message to you on this is that the Commission has proposed a solution to address these issues with the seriousness that they deserve. We would welcome your recommendations to the government to introduce a national anti-racism framework for Australia.

Friends, we are all here because we want to see our communities and people in Australia thrive and live the best lives they can. The UPR is a moment to ask what more can we do to achieve this? And how can we work together to achieve this common aspiration?

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I commend to you the report, implementation matrix and fact sheets that we have prepared to guide your recommendations on Australia in the forthcoming UPR.

I look forward to continuing to discuss this and the key elements of our proposed national reform agenda for human rights with you.

Thank you