

**Statement - Australian NGO Coalition
Virtual Pre-session - December 2020**

My name is Bridget Burton. I represent the Australian NGO Coalition. Our joint report is endorsed by over 200 organisations. I acknowledge Coalition partners speaking on other areas addressed in the report.

Australia still has significant work to do to entrench human rights into Australian law and fully develop a human rights culture. **Australia must adopt a comprehensive, judicially enforceable Charter of Human Rights within 3 years. Australia must remove all treaty reservations and ratify remaining human rights treaties including those which facilitate complaints under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed serious gaps in Australia's human rights protections. The economic, social and cultural needs of the worst affected groups, older people, people with disabilities, women (especially in terms of safety at home, and employment), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are not adequately addressed by Australia's response.

Many people currently receiving a pandemic-related boost to social security payments stand to lose an adequate standard of living in 2021, with reducing payments insufficient to cover basic housing and food. **Australia must immediately address economic inequality in a pandemic impacted world. This must include permanently raising the rate of income support for people without paid work, students, parents and people with a disability.**

In 2019 Australia's Aged Care Royal Commission revealed a sector in crisis; describing a 'shocking tale of neglect' in a 'cruel and harmful system' that includes gross understaffing, inadequate nutrition and excessive use of physical and chemical restraint. In 2020, these years of neglect manifested in a chaotic pandemic response and hundreds of avoidable deaths. **Australia must urgently strengthen human rights protections for older people and ensure the aged care system complies with treaty obligations.**

In 2018, the Australian Government introduced broad new 'espionage' offences with up to 25 years jail that could criminalise certain public interest journalism. Journalists' homes and workplaces were raided by police and whistleblowers have been prosecuted. **Australia must repeal laws criminalising public interest journalism and strengthen protection for whistleblowers who expose serious wrongdoing within Government.**

Australia is failing on climate change. Last summer unprecedented bushfires took lives and destroyed communities. In Australia's North, increasingly extreme weather events including floods and cyclones are ruining livelihoods, and sea level rises threaten island communities and cultures. Climate action is a human rights issue.

We urge states to raise these matters with Australia.

Thank you
October 2020

Contact the Australian NGO Coalition: upr@hrlc.org.au
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