



Speech by

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Australia's National Statement at the High-Level Segment

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I begin by paying my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples joining us here today, as well as indigenous peoples from other nations.

I recognise the unique and lasting contribution that Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to our nation, as do indigenous cultures all around the world.

Mr President, High Commissioner, Ministers, Excellencies, and distinguished delegates.

It is a great honour to deliver the Australian Government's National Statement to the High Level Segment of this 37th Session of the Human Rights Council, Australia's very first session as a Council Member.

Australia is a nation that believes—in principle and in practice—in the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings.

This is why from the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, Australia has always sought to develop and protect a multilateral system where relations between states are governed by international law, rules and norms.

We are proud of our instrumental role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year.

Seventy years on, we remain absolutely committed to advancing human rights for all.

Our experience is that building fundamental human rights and freedoms into the fabric of society makes us safer, more prosperous and more secure.

The Human Rights Council is vital to the protection and promotion of global human rights.

Australia is honoured to take up our seat on the UN Human Rights Council.

We are arguably one of the most successful and diverse, multicultural societies on earth— a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, languages and religions.

Our great ethnic and cultural diversity gives us the capacity to understand global human rights issues, including from an Indo-Pacific perspective.

Australia has welcomed more than 7 million migrants—including 800,000 refugees that came in waves since the Second World War—in a population today of 24 million people.

We do not seek to define ourselves by race or religion, and we find strength in our egalitarian multicultural society.

Australia strives to promote shared values, with political, economic and religious freedoms.

We are a liberal and modern democracy where all views are heard and respected.

The rule of law is fundamental to ensuring all are equal before our system of justice.

These core Australian values were at the heart of the Australian Government's decision to seek a seat on the Human Rights Council.

Australia supports efforts to strengthen the Council, including by finding practical ways to streamline its increasing workload.

A balanced and representative multilateral system requires all states to participate.

We will work across regional groupings to understand different perspectives on Council issues.

We will also help to amplify the voices of the Pacific, and ensure the voices of small states are heard.

We also support the independent mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

As a member of the Human Rights Council over the next three years, Australia will be guided by the commitments we made as a candidate.

Australia firmly believes gender equality is a right not a privilege.

We recognise that effective governance assists communities to share in the benefits of economic growth, stability and development.

We will promote freedom of expression.

We will advance the rights of Indigenous peoples, who continue to face disproportionately high rates of marginalisation and discrimination around the world.

Australia supports National Human Rights Institutions compliant with the Paris Principles.

Australia will maintain its strong advocacy for equal human rights, non-discrimination and non-violence for LGBTI persons.

Australia is a longstanding and steadfast opponent of the death penalty, in all circumstances, for all people.

Australia is deeply committed to upholding freedom of religion or belief.

All individuals should enjoy the right to follow a religious tradition or belief system—or not—of their choice.

In the Council, we will uphold and promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Domestically and internationally, we will work to enhance civil society participation in UN processes.

We will also work to protect human rights defenders against reprisals.

Australia has already begun delivering on its pledges, including by ratifying in December the *Optional Protocol of the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*.

Throughout our term, Australia will continue to be a responsible international human rights citizen.

Our membership bid was underpinned by a commitment to transparency and accountability.

We appreciate that there are no easy solutions to the many challenges before us, however we are keen to work with Council members, observer nations and civil society.

We understand and support the value of robust debate.

We are open to scrutiny.

All ideas and proposals must be considered and tested if we are to find the most effective and efficient responses to the issues that come before the Council.

Membership of this Council brings great responsibility, while it also offers opportunity and potential for good.

We have a duty to promote the rights of the most vulnerable, oppressed and discriminated communities, and to seek universality of human rights to all parts of the world.

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