

## Human Rights Council – 37th Session

Individual interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief  
2 March 2018

### Australian Statement

Freedom of religion or belief belongs to individuals, not religious traditions. It includes, but is not limited to, the freedom to adopt a religion or belief, change or leave that religion or belief, act on or practise one's beliefs and not to hold a religion or belief. Religious freedom and tolerance are fundamental to open, multicultural and resilient societies.

We agree with the Special Rapporteur's views that states must act as an impartial guarantor and must not use religious rights and views to limit or veto other rights unjustifiably.

Australia remains concerned about the severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief maintained by some governments, including the use of 'blasphemy legislation'. We are alarmed that individuals are being sentenced to death purely on the basis of their religion or beliefs. We strongly oppose the use of the death penalty in all circumstances for all people.

Australia is particularly concerned about the situation of religious minorities in the Middle East, including Christians, Yazidis, the Baha'is, and some Muslim minority groups.

Australia continues to consider how to protect freedom of religion or belief at home. We are looking forward to considering an expert panel report examining whether Australian law adequately protects the right to freedom of religion or belief, which will be released at the end of this month.

We ask the Special Rapporteur, how can States best support the work of civil society actors to build coalitions that transcend boundaries based on religion or belief?

**250 Words**