

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS



FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PROTECTING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS
AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ISSUE SHEET

The Australian Democrats have an unwavering commitment to the protection of human rights, not only within Australia but throughout the world.

Human rights are universal. They apply equally to every human being, regardless of race, gender, age, religion or sexuality.

Every country has an obligation to protect human rights within its own borders, but not all countries accept this obligation equally. This is why it is important for the international community to work together to protect rights of all human beings.



Australia's obligations

Australia has a responsibility to protect human rights both at home and abroad. We need to make it clear that our commitment to human rights is non-negotiable. This means we will not ignore human rights abuses for the sake of trade, economic or security deals with other countries.

The Democrats believe Australia should strive to be a global leader in our unwavering commitment to human rights. This means leading the way by signing onto significant human rights agreements and

conventions and by ensuring that we have an impeccable human rights record at home. Unfortunately, the Howard Government

Iraqis wait for information about relatives detained at Abu Ghraib prison, May 14, 2004 (Photo © Damir Sagloj/Reuters). www.hrw.org

does not share these views and there has been a documented decrease in the Government's commitment to human rights during the term of this Government.

International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was specifically established to bring to justice those who commit the worst crimes against humanity, including war crimes and genocide. However, the United States refuses to recognise the jurisdiction of the Court. The US is seeking agreements with countries around the world to ensure that they do not surrender US citizens to the ICC and the Australian Government has agreed to negotiate with the US for one of these agreements.

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As the evidence of prisoner abuse in Iraq demonstrates, US citizens are just as capable of committing human rights violations as anyone else. There is no reason why they should be immune from prosecution in the ICC. The Democrats have called on the Government not to sign an immunity agreement with the US and we will do everything we can to prevent the ratification of such an Agreement by the Parliament.

Guantanamo Bay

The Democrats have long opposed the detention facility operating within Guantanamo Bay. The US has created a system designed to escape its obligations under both international and domestic law, ensuring that detainees have no rights under either.

The Australian Government has been negligent in its efforts to protect the rights of Australian detainees, David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib. Like British detainees, the Democrats believe these Australians should be brought home to face trial or be released.

The Asia-Pacific Region

There are a range of serious human rights concerns within the Asia-Pacific region, from the persecution of Tibetans, Falun Gong practitioners and Christians within China, to restrictions on freedom of speech in Vietnam.

At Australia's own doorstep, there is evidence of ongoing human rights violations within West Papua and Aceh. Not to mention the violations being perpetrated by our own Government, - for example, locking up families who have fled from persecution.

By virtue of Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific, we have a special responsibility to combat human rights violations in this region. The Democrats believe that Australia should use its relationship with its neighbours to raise concerns about human rights violations. Although we need to be conscious of the political sensitivities in the region, we should never let these sensitivities compromise our commitment to human rights. The Democrats will continue to work hard to ensure that Australia fulfils its human rights obligations and regains its position as a global leader on human rights.



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