



AUSTRALIA

Commission on Human Rights Sixty-First Session

Item 9

Statement by Australia

Delivered by Mike Smith

Permanent Representative

24 March 2005.

Mr Chairman

Australia is convinced that good governance, democracy, effective domestic institutions and prompt, effective responses to humanitarian crises will assist all people to claim and exercise their human rights. This Commission represents an opportunity for the international community to work together on these issues to make practical improvements to ordinary people's lives - particularly if we can do so in the same spirit of cooperation that characterised the impressive international response to the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami. It also offers an opportunity for all of us to speak frankly about what concerns us, as part of a constructive dialogue on human rights.

We applaud those countries that have advanced the human rights of their citizens in practical and meaningful ways. We welcome the trend to **freedom and democracy in various parts of the world** as shown by the recent elections in Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesian and the Palestinian Authority, and demonstrations of people power in Lebanon and Ukraine.

We welcome progress in the **Middle East peace process** and the commitment of the Palestinian Authority to stop terrorism. It is essential that the Palestinian Authority takes active measures to stamp out terrorist organisations. We welcome Israel's withdrawal from Jericho and commitment to withdraw from Gaza and other parts of the West Bank. We urge all sides to maintain the momentum of the peace process and to ensure that steps taken are consistent with the Roadmap.

We also welcome progress in **Iraq's** transition to a free and democratic society. By turning out for the national elections in numbers that exceeded expectations, and by voting in the face of intimidation by a small but violent minority, Iraqis demonstrated their great courage and their determination to take control of their country's future. We condemn continuing terrorist attacks.

Mr Chairman,

We continue to work constructively in a spirit of mutual dialogue on human rights with our close regional partners and would like to acknowledge positive developments.

We welcome the resumption of peace talks between the **Indonesian** Government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). We believe that the best prospect for a sustainable solution to separatism lies in effective implementation of special autonomy within a united Indonesia. We encourage Indonesia to ensure the Papuan People's Council becomes an effective step towards establishing special autonomy in Papua. We are also encouraged by the agreement with Timor Leste to establish a Truth and Friendship Commission to solve outstanding problems relating to past human rights abuses.

We value **China's** frank approach to our bilateral human rights dialogue and welcome its increasing awareness of the need to improve human rights. We urge China to press ahead with planned legal and administrative reforms and to address the issue of political detainees and the high number of executions in recent years and to allow citizens freedom of expression and assembly. We urge China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as soon as possible.

Mr Chairman,

There remain a number of situations that greatly concern Australians.

The appalling humanitarian crisis in Darfur must end. The Government of **Sudan** has failed to rein in pro-government militias or punish those who commit crimes, including widespread sexual violence. We urge all parties to respect ceasefire arrangements, to stop violence against civilians and to cooperate with the international community in ending this humanitarian disaster and ensuring that those guilty of crimes are brought to justice. We urge members of the Security Council to take firm action.

Australia remains deeply concerned about **Zimbabwe's** human rights record. We condemn the systematic use of state-sponsored violence, intimidation and harassment and call for the repeal of anti-democratic legislation that denies rights of free expression, association and assembly. We doubt whether parliamentary elections scheduled for 31 March can be free and fair and trust that those invited to send observers can judge the elections impartially and help hold the government accountable.

We urge the **DPRK** to address pressing human rights and humanitarian concerns, including the torture of political prisoners and severe restrictions on religious freedom, and to provide access to the Special Rapporteur.

Australia remains gravely concerned about human rights, national reconciliation and genuine political reform in **Burma**. We are concerned that the resumed National Convention is proceeding without broad participation and open debate. We call upon the government to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and to end restrictions on freedom of association, assembly and expression. We strongly urge the Burmese government to cooperate with the International Labour Organization to eliminate forced labour, and to stop the use of child soldiers. Australia supports the efforts of UN Special Envoy Razali and Special Rapporteur Pinheiro, and calls on Burma to resume country visits.

We are particularly concerned by ongoing violations of legal due process and suppression of press and other freedoms of expression in **Iran**. We urge Iran to do more to protect the rights of women and children, especially in the judicial system, and to uphold the rights of minorities, including the Baha'i and Jewish communities.

Australia calls upon the King of **Nepal** to restore multiparty democracy. We call on all parties to support efforts which promote peace and stability for the people of Nepal.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.