



AUSTRALIAN  
LAWYERS  
FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS

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## Media release

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### NGOs Call on Government to Advance Social and Economic Rights.

The 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2014 marked the first anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Leading human rights organisation, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (**ALHR**), has joined a prominent group of NGO s in calling on the government to celebrate this anniversary by ratifying the Optional Protocol.

Nathan Kennedy, President of ALHR said This agreement will help advance social and economic rights like housing, water, health and education rights that Australian people have consistently demanded from their governments.

Australia has been a State Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for nearly 40 years. Countries including Ireland, France, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain have signed the Optional Protocol which allows people to seek the assistance of the United Nations if their rights under the Covenant are violated.

Organisations who have signed the open letter with ALHR include Amnesty International, Save the Children Australia, The Human Rights Law Centre, the Australian Council of Social Service and the Aboriginal Child, Family & Community Secretariat.

Mr Kennedy called on the government to show leadership on this issue. We urge the government to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol this month, thus making a public commitment to its own policies such as Closing the Gap and to protecting human rights and eradicating poverty at home and internationally .

Mr Kennedy said By ratifying the Optional Protocol, the government would show that it is willing to empower people living in poverty. It would sent a signal to other countries in the Asia Pacific region and globally that we can no longer be complacent about the marginalisation and neglect of those living in poverty.

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### Background Note:

#### **The 12 Organisations that have signed the letter are:**

Aboriginal Child, Family & Community Secretariat (AbSec)  
Amnesty International Australia

*ALHR (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights) is a network of Australian lawyers active in practising and promoting awareness of international human rights standards in Australia. ALHR has a national membership of over 3000 people, with active National, State and Territory committees.*

Australian Council of Social Service  
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights  
Human Rights Law Centre  
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific  
National Association of Community Legal Centres  
National Council for Single Mothers and Their Children  
National Mental Health and Consumer Care Forum  
New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council  
Save the Children  
YWCA Australia

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was ratified by Australia in 1975 thereby making it legally binding on the country. It provides for rights including the right to water, food, work, housing, education, health and an adequate standard of living.

The optional protocol will give people the right, if they cannot secure justice in their own country, to have a violation of these rights investigated by an independent, international panel of experts.

A comprehensive list of States that have signed and ratified the Optional Protocol is available here: [https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtmsg\\_no=iv-3-a&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtmsg_no=iv-3-a&chapter=4&lang=en)

The open letter to the government is attached to this press release.