



AUSTRALIAN
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Media Release

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Australia Slides Backwards on Human Rights as Abbott Rejects United Nations Torture Findings

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, has delivered a report finding that Australia is violating the UN Convention Against Torture by detaining children in immigration detention, and holding asylum seekers in dangerous and violent conditions in offshore processing centres.

Following comments that Australians were “sick of being lectured to by the United Nations”, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has labelled the findings of this latest UN report as “absolutely bizarre” saying “You’d think the UN would be saying good on Australia for stopping the boats and stopping the drowning.”

Claire Hammerton, spokesperson for Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, stated that the UN report “unequivocally highlights the fact that the Australian Government is breaching its international obligations and violating the rights of asylum seekers to be free from torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”

“As well as prohibiting torture, the UN Convention Against Torture extends to acts of degrading treatment such as the infliction of severe physical or mental pain and suffering. The report outlines numerous examples of instances where physical and mental suffering has been inflicted on asylum seekers in immigration detention facilities both within Australia and controlled by Australia. It suggests that some of these instances may amount to torture” Ms Hammerton said.

In response to the Prime Minister’s comments Ms Hammerton stated that “The UN’s findings are based on credible and reliable information. What is ‘bizarre’ is the utter contempt shown by the Australian Government in exercising a flagrant disregard for international law and the important role played by the United Nations in monitoring adherence to that law.”

“The international community has now spoken very loudly and clearly that Australia has breached its obligations under a treaty it has ratified. Instead of working with the United Nations to develop safe pathways for refugees in the region, the Australian Government seems determined to see Australia slide backwards in relation to the rule of law, and respect for basic human dignity. In so doing we not only cause significant harm to the individuals whom are subject to our egregious refugee policies but also to Australia’s reputation as a good international citizen”

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ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national network of over 2600 Australian solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and a secretariat at La Trobe University Law School in Melbourne.