



AUSTRALIAN
LAWYERS
FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS

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MEDIA RELEASE

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“2017 is the Year for Promoting & Protecting Human Rights in Australia” National conference examining Australia’s human rights performance looms

At a time when Australians’ human rights have never been more under threat, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) will hold a two-day national conference focused on improving human rights protections in Australia from February 17.

The conference will bring together leaders in law, academia, business and community sectors and aims to improve strategic planning and strengthen vital links between lawyers and advocates to protect human rights nationally and generate an ongoing dialogue on human rights issues that impact all Australians.

“The protection of human rights is now at a very low point in Australian history. Our government has received unprecedented and ongoing severe criticism from the international community for its failure to uphold even the most basic human rights standards. Tumultuous world events have led to a surge in the number of people seeking asylum, unprecedented escalated national security measures including unparalleled surveillance – and an alarming normalisation of hate speech,” ALHR President Benedict Coyne said.

“Australia’s treatment of vulnerable participants in the criminal justice system is under the spotlight, as too is our failure to address human rights issues faced by Indigenous Australians. The often woefully inadequate responses by our government to these challenges have led to serious human rights violations. This is more than just alarming. It is unconscionable.

“By putting forward Australia's candidacy for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Federal Government effectively promises to promote human rights and champion the rights of marginalised people- overseas! Ironically, we are the only western democracy without the protection of some form of a Bill of Rights or legislative human rights act at the federal level. We rely on the good faith of our parliamentarians to protect us rather than the protection of law to guarantee our human rights. Too many times a blind faith in the parliament has led to human rights violations against the Australian people by the governments of Australia. This system all too often fails the most vulnerable to human rights abuses with little recourse. This must end – Australians deserve and should demand legal protection of our basic human rights now in order to properly protect our democratic way of life.

“The legal community is one of the best-placed sectors to champion these serious

challenges to democracy and democratic institutions. The ALHR National Human Rights Conference will bring together some of Australia's most prominent human rights advocates to examine topical issues such as our treatment of refugees, disability rights, violence against women and freedom of speech.

"We must urgently prudently plan strategic pathways toward improving human rights protections in Australia for the wellbeing of our families, our friends, our fellow Aussies and future generations. This is a must-attend event for all lawyers, advocates and champions of human rights practising in Australia or internationally," said Mr Coyne.

The inaugural conference is held in partnership with La Trobe University's Law School, an active partner in the fight for social justice and human rights.

"This event provides a unique platform to strengthen links between lawyers and advocates concerned with the protection of human rights, and to promote international human rights and rule of law in Australia," La Trobe Law School Head, Patrick Keyzer, said.

To arrange an interview with [Benedict Coyne], please contact Matt Mitchell on 0431 980 365 or media@alhr.org.au

For more information on Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, go to www.alhr.org.au