

Media Release



Federation of
Community Legal Centres
VICTORIA

Human rights response “underwhelming”

21 April 2010

The Victorian Federation of Community Legal Centres expressed disappointment at the Federal Government’s response to the National Human Rights Consultation launched today by Attorney-General Robert McClelland.

“The response is very underwhelming,” said Federation Executive Officer Hugh de Kretser. “After the biggest public consultation in Australia’s political history, with participation by over 40,000 people, and with 87% of submissions that addressed the issue supporting an Australian Human Rights Act, the government’s response is basically to do as little as possible.”

“On the one hand, the government is reaffirming that human rights are important and committing to spend \$12 million on human rights education. On the other, it is saying those rights are not important enough to deserve comprehensive protection in a Human Rights Act.”

“Several aspects of the response are welcome, in particular the education initiative and the measures to increase Parliamentary scrutiny of human rights, but the response ignores key findings and recommendations of the National Human Rights Consultation Committee, including the recommendation to adopt a National Human Rights Act. The Committee had reported that human rights protection in Australia is currently inadequate - describing it as a patchwork quilt of protections that needs mending. The government has said today that it’s not going to fix all of the holes.”

“The commitment to ‘consider revising’ the Australian Public Sector Values and Code of Conduct to recognise the need for public servants to respect human rights is particularly unimpressive. If the government wants its public servants and agencies to respect human rights, it should require this by law. This is what Victoria has done and it’s what the National Human Rights Consultation Committee recommended.”

“The Victorian and ACT experience has shown the difference that human rights legislation can make, improving the lives of our most vulnerable citizens by promoting more responsive and targeted public services, better policy outcomes and greater government accountability.”

“Overall, the Federal Government’s response is a small step forward for human rights in Australia, which is overshadowed by missed opportunities.”

Further information:

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