



Queensland Advocacy Incorporated

Our mission is to promote, protect and defend, through advocacy, the fundamental needs and rights and lives of the most vulnerable people with disability in Queensland.

Systems and Legal Advocacy for vulnerable people with Disability

MEDIA RELEASE

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QUEENSLAND ADVOCATES APPLAUD THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT TO ENDING TORTURE

Queensland Advocacy Inc Director Michelle O'Flynn is cautiously excited about the news that the Attorney General George Brandis and Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop have just committed to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). "Many advocates across the country have worked for over a decade towards a commitment to ratifying OPCAT. You could hear the very careful cheering around the ether yesterday."

However, most academics, advocates and NGO's who have been involved in the collective action that has taken place are concerned that announcements such as yesterday's can be forgotten or that a 'change of mind' will prompt the government to renege on its commitment.

Further, while the Ombudsman has been named as the co-ordinating body for the network of Australian inspectorates, there has been no mention of the Australian Human Rights Commission as the most appropriate and logical statutory actor in the National Preventative Mechanisms as the national voice for human rights.

While Nauru is a signatory to the Convention Against Torture, and therefore should be part of the process, it appears that the the immigration detention centre there may be excluded from inspections by the committee. Manus Island as part of PNG is not a signatory to the CAT and therefore does not fall into this regime, despite the detention centre being established at the behest of Australia.

"The cynic in me does wonder if the announcement is more to influence the decision about Australia's candidacy to the United Nation's Human Rights Council." Ms O'Flynn said. "If the government is genuine, why wait until the end of the year after the vote for the Council is cast? Why not ratify right now?"

Given the attention to the treatment of juveniles at Don Dale detention centre last year, and the renewed focus on rehabilitation over incarceration, QAI is hopeful and encouraged that with this announcement all states and territories will work with advocates and supporters towards advancing the humans right agenda in Australia. "It is important to remind ourselves that we are talking about the fragility of human life, when the tendency is to refer to statistics when reading the headlines in newspapers from the comfort of our homes. How people ever emerge from those facilities is critically dependent on how they are treated and if we do not want to create either monsters or broken shells, then we must change our practices of detention." Michelle O'Flynn went on to say.

Ph: (07) 3844 4200 or 1300 130 582 Fax: (07) 3844 4220 Email: qai@qai.org.au Website: www.qai.org.au

2nd Floor, South Central, 43 Peel Street, STH BRISBANE QLD 4101

QAI endorses the objectives, and promotes the principles, of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Patron: His Excellency The Honorable Paul de Jersey AC