

Human rights consultation will enhance democracy: PILCH

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH) has today welcomed the federal Government's launch of a national consultation on the protection and promotion of human rights and responsibilities, calling the process profoundly democratic and long past due.

Mat Tinkler, PILCH Acting Executive Director, said the consultation should provide a forum to those whose human rights are routinely violated and inform the development of laws to protect Australia's most vulnerable citizens.

'Australia is rightly proud of our robust democracy, but that doesn't mean that our laws and system of government can't be improved,' said Mr Tinkler.

'In honouring its election commitment, the Rudd Government has taken an important step towards promoting a core minimum set of shared Australian values by which all Australians should be judged. By establishing an open-ended consultation, the Government has sensibly kept its mind open on the issue of how best to protect and promote human rights in Australia.

'Australia is the only western democracy without a bill or charter of human rights and PILCH routinely assists disadvantaged clients who fall through the cracks of our legal system. The homeless, asylum seekers, people with a disability and racial and religious minorities are just some of the clients that our present laws fail to adequately protect.

'For these reasons, PILCH supports a human rights act that enshrines fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that will improve the accountability of government and entrench the quintessential Australian sense of a "fair go" for all,' said Mr Tinkler.

However, PILCH warned that a worthwhile consultation must be comprehensive and well funded, and cautioned the Government against viewing the consultation itself as a panacea to rights violations.

'The Attorney-General has rightly said that it is paramount that the consultation hears from as "many Australians as possible, with attitudes and views right across the country and right across the spectrum",' said Mr Tinkler.

'In order to ensure this occurs, the consultation must go to those communities whose rights are most at risk, such as the homeless and Indigenous communities in remote areas, and the Government should commit to taking steps to address and remedy any systemic rights violations that are uncovered by the consultation.

'PILCH encourages Australians from all walks of life to participate in the consultation and share their views on how best to protect human rights in Australia,' said Mr Tinkler.

Contact

Mat Tinkler, Acting Executive Director

(03) 8636 4405

mat.tinkler@pilch.org.au