



**World Council
of Churches**



**National Council of
Churches in Australia**

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Stakeholder Submission on Australia

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Introduction

This submission is made jointly by the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)¹ under the provision in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for “other stakeholders”. The NCCA is 18 national Christian Churches that each bring a widely varied history of place, experience and theology, but we share a common faith and confession in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. We also share a common future as we are convinced that the future of Christians in Australia lies together, not in separation.

The submission was prepared by the NCCA secretariat, with assistance from a group of policy experts from the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers Australia), Salvation Army Australia Territory, the Uniting Church in Australia and the World Council of Churches.

This submission draws on research and policy positions on social justice and human rights from member Churches in Australia,² and their agencies that work closely with vulnerable

¹ See for list of the 18 member Churches: <https://www.ncca.org.au/member-churches/>

² We wish to acknowledge the social justice policy work of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference <https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/resources/social-justice-statements/>; the Salvation Army's Social Justice Stocktake 2025, which surveyed 16,000 participants across Australia on the issues most affecting their communities; <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/socialjusticestocktake/national/#climate-change>; the Uniting

people on the peripheries of society whose human dignity and rights are at greater risk of infringement. Christians believe the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, called to be fully human and fully alive, with an inherent dignity from which flows human rights which are inalienable and universal. The protection of human rights then is an important part of the Christian mission. We welcome the opportunity to offer these reflections and recommendations on the state of some aspects of human rights in Australia.

It focuses on First Nations peoples; asylum seekers, refugees and migrants; people at risk of family and domestic violence; homelessness and peace-making. Climate change must be regarded as the defining context for the consideration of human rights given its far reaching and devastating impacts which are already being felt in Australia and even more acutely by our Pacific neighbours.

1) Climate Change and Human Rights

Australia's national report to the UPR in 2020 makes no mention of climate change. The Australian government delegation to that UPR did acknowledge that climate change could exacerbate difficulties already faced by vulnerable communities and reaffirmed Australia's commitment to tackle climate change and meet the 2020 Paris Agreement target on net zero emissions. Out of 344 recommendations from the 122 countries there were just 8 on climate change. In trying to understand this from our Christian lens, it appears that the mutually reinforcing negative impacts of climate change and human rights abuses reflects a failure to meaningfully connect them. There appears to be a lack of integration between the UN's climate change international agreements and its human rights infrastructure. It may also be the case that what is contained in a UPR country report dictates the nature of the responses.

2024 was the hottest year on record globally, when the average global temperature exceeded 1.5°C above its pre-industrial level. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that warming beyond this threshold poses severe risks to the planet. In Australia, climate change has led to more frequent and intense weather events like floods, heatwaves, extreme bushfires and loss of World Heritage coral reefs and forests. All of these impact on human rights, as well as on the population's physical and mental health and on Australia's biodiversity. Disaster trends are becoming more complex, compounding and cascading, and expected to get worse.

Regional and remote Aboriginal housing is not able to withstand climate change and will be unsuitable for future living, forcing people to consider migrating away from their traditional lands if nothing is done. Rising sea levels, warmer atmospheric and ocean temperatures, more acidic waters, changes in ocean circulation, and more intense rainfall patterns are expected to impact the Torres Strait into the future.³

Our neighbours in the Pacific and elsewhere are suffering from the impacts of climate change. Australia is providing migration pathways for people from Tuvalu facing the existential threat of climate change which is the world's first bilateral agreement on climate

Church in Australia <https://uniting.church/justice/>; Catholic Religious Australia, Society of St Vincent de Paul Australia; Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Australia, and Anglicare.

³ <https://www.csiro.au/en/news/All/Articles/2023/November/Torres-Strait-climate-change>

mobility. Our Pacific nation neighbours, contributing less than 0.03% of total global emissions, are disproportionately affected by climate change.

On the positive side, the Climate Council has determined that Australia is on track to reach its national target to reduce our emissions by 43% by 2030.⁴ However, while Australia is making progress, it is moving too slowly. The UN's 2023 Global Stocktake⁵, which assesses the world's progress towards the Paris Agreement's goals, makes clear that global efforts towards net zero need to be drastically accelerated. This will be challenging for Australia as in 2024, Australia emitted 441 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, with plans to reduce this to 352 million tonnes by 2030.

Coal and Gas Exports

However, the continued expansion of coal mining projects undermines these efforts. Notably, in December 2024, the government approved extensions for four coal mines—three in Queensland and one in NSW—and in late September 2024, sanctioned three new coal mines in NSW capable of producing 1.4 billion tonnes of emissions, over three times Australia's annual emissions. Moreover, there are 36 additional coal mining projects and six gas projects awaiting government decisions. That Australia is the third-largest exporter of fossil fuels globally underscores its substantial contribution to carbon emissions.

Australia's dual role as an emitter and significant fossil fuel exporter calls for urgent and decisive action to align with global greenhouse gas reduction efforts for the collective good of humanity and the environment. Australia needs a strong emissions reduction target that responds with urgency to the climate crisis, and a suite of policies to reach this target, moving towards renewable energy and transport systems, and away from fossil fuels, the largest emissions contributor.

Recommendations

1. We call on the Australian government to improve and make explicit the connections in its policy development on mitigating climate change to its human rights frameworks.
2. As the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the region, the Government of Australia must take bold action to rapidly reduce emissions from all sources and sectors including through agriculture. While Australia is on track to meet the target set by the Paris Climate Agreement, by reducing carbon emissions by 45% on 2010 levels by 2030, there can be no room for complacency and the government must continue to work towards net zero emissions by 2050 to keep global warming to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
3. We call upon the Government to work in partnership with all state and territory governments, local governments and businesses who have already committed towards net zero emissions, to adopt renewable energy sources as a matter of urgency.

⁴ https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CC_MVSA0394-CC-Report-Next-Wave_V8-FA-Screen-Single.pdf

⁵ <https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake>

4. There must be a ban on all new coal mines and coal-powered electricity generation, combined with the orderly phase-out of the existing plants to create the low-carbon and renewable energy industries of the future. There must also be a reduction in gas production and methane emissions which are key contributors to Australia's carbon budget. Social and economic support to the employees of extractive industries and their communities who will be affected must be ensured.
5. Measures to reverse the alarming loss of unique Australian species and for the preservation of vulnerable ecosystems must be adopted, as well as national water-use policies that can protect rural communities facing continuing drought.
6. Australia must support the human rights of local and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities whose cultural heritage, way of life or livelihoods have been negatively affected by climate change.
7. At the international level, Australia must add its voice to those Governments around the world who are seeking to strengthen climate finance commitments, supporting initiatives that build climate resilience and adaptation and assist recovery from climate-induced disasters. Current climate financing around USD\$0.2 - 0.6 billion is far short of the USD\$1.5 billion needed per year for mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage. Australia, a professed member of the 'Pacific family', needs to make a greater financial contribution.

2) First Nations People

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention centres in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

- Uluru Statement from the Heart 2017, developed by 250 Indigenous representatives from across Australia.

The poignancy of this statement is felt ever more acutely today with multiple crises impacting the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of the oldest living culture in the world. They are also amongst the Australians who experience the most disadvantage. There were almost 60 recommendations across a range of themes in the responses from countries to Australia's UPR in 2020, reflecting the serious global concern about the human rights infringements of Australia's First Peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience lower life expectancy and poorer health outcomes, while encountering higher rates of infant and maternal morbidity and mortality, family and domestic violence, suicide, and incarceration.

There are both historical and current contributors to this disadvantage and infringement of human rights, and the experience of colonialism and suppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have an ongoing negative effect on people from these cultures. Many of the drivers of disadvantage are systemic and structural. This means that as well as

addressing disadvantage as it is experienced, there is need to address the underlying structures which cause, or lead to, discrimination and hardship.

Closing the Gap

Successive governments have committed to “Closing the Gap” between outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and those enjoyed by non-Indigenous Australians. With the Closing the Gap targets, there have been positive outcomes. Near universal enrolment in pre-school has been achieved. Over the last 12 years the number of First Peoples commencing university courses has more than doubled.⁶ After adjusting for population growth and ageing, there was a 15% decrease in total burden of disease for First Peoples between 2003 and 2018, based on the most recent analysis.⁷

While there are positives that include increased life expectancy, better health outcomes, improved educational opportunities, and greater economic participation, we are not making the progress that was intended in the Closing the Gap targets. The Productivity Commission Review report⁸ in February 2024 emphasised the need for a departure from a tokenistic approach and encourages governments to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations, and communities in assessing and addressing institutional racism and unconscious bias. The report also highlights the importance of empowering Indigenous communities to drive their own solutions and participate actively in decision-making processes.

While governments have committed to “Closing the Gap” there are still issues with how the policies and programs created to close the gap are designed and implemented. It is critical that governments co-design and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in good faith to design programs that are truly fit for purpose and culturally appropriate.

Only five out of 19 “Closing the Gap” targets are on track. Children thriving in early childhood, imprisonment rates, the proportion of children in out-of-home care, and social and emotional wellbeing, have all worsened in recent years.⁹ The most recent “Closing the Gap” review identified that the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was still substantial (8.6 years for males and 7.8 years for females)¹⁰. The Australian government should commit to sustainable funding and resourcing of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations that provide early intervention and diversionary services. Federal and state governments are failing to embed the priority reforms in policy and funding decisions, with the commitment to shared decision-making rarely achieved in practice. Community-driven solutions work, yet little has been done to move away from top-down approaches.

Most incarcerated

⁶ [Higher education commencement, attrition, and completion rates - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways - Dashboard | Closing the Gap Information Repository - Productivity Commission](#)

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024), Health and wellbeing of First Nations people.

⁸ Productivity Commission. (2024). Closing the Gap Information Repository. [\[Link\]](#)

⁹ Productivity Commission. (2024). Closing the Gap Information Repository. [\[Link\]](#)

¹⁰ Productivity Commission. (2024). Closing the Gap Information Repository. [\[Link\]](#)

Proportionally, Australia's First Peoples are the most incarcerated people on the planet. First Peoples comprise over 30 per cent of the adult prison population. Even more distressingly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth constitute 6.6% per cent of the total youth population in Australia but represent sixty percent of youth in detention aged 10 and over across the country.¹¹

"The various criminal legal systems operating in Australia appear to be in crisis nationwide," said Alice Jill Edwards, the Special Rapporteur on torture and Albert K. Barume, Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. "Children are suffering undue harm to their safety and well-being, as well as to their educational and life prospects as a result of short-sighted approaches to youth criminality and detention."¹² The Closing the Gap target is that by 2031, there will be a reduction in the rate of Indigenous young people (10–17 years) in detention by at least 30%. Australia has made no progress on this target.

Failure of the Voice referendum

October 2023 saw the failure of a constitutional referendum to create a Federal Voice to Parliament that would be a permanent advisory body that would give advice to the government about the issues that affect First Nations peoples. 60 per cent of Australians voted against it. The impact of this is still being felt by communities across the country, as First and Second Peoples try to discern the way forward. The Australian government has committed to implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. In the wake of the "No" referendum result in 2023, it is critical that action to address historic and contemporary human rights injustices, and centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in every conversation that concerns them, is maintained.

Recommendations

1. The request for a national Makarrata (Treaty) Commission from the Uluru Statement from the Heart still stands. The federal government should not leave treaty and truth-telling processes to State and Territory governments alone, but should commit to a national approach to truth-telling that would inform and support the local, State and Territory processes, and provide a national repository of Australian history. The government at federal and state levels, develop appropriate structures for formal Truth-telling to occur, leading to communal acceptance of the ongoing impact of colonisation, including the story of the Stolen Generations, and the ongoing impacts of trauma on First Peoples' families and communities.
2. That self-determination at Federal, state and local levels is informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), giving First Peoples' communities full control over decisions impacting their lives, country and cultural sites.

¹¹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2024/contents/summary/first-nations-young-people-in-detention>

¹² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/media-advisories/2025/05/youth-justice-systems-across-australia-crisis-un-experts>

3. The Australian government needs to commit to shared decision-making and sustainable, needs-based funding and support that allows Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to grow and strengthen their services.
4. While governments have committed to “Closing the Gap” there are still issues with how the policies and programs created to close the gap are designed and implemented. It is critical that governments co-design and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in good faith to design programs that are truly fit for purpose and culturally appropriate.
5. Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age across all Australian jurisdictions. The age of criminal responsibility in most Australian states and territories is 10. This is younger than in most other industrialised countries. This contravenes the benchmark of a minimum age of 14 established in international law. Australia has been widely criticised for not adhering to international recommended standards.¹³ In the 2020 UPR, 25 countries called on Australia to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14. The Australian government should enshrine a National Children’s Act that upholds child rights as per the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and ensures that state and territory juvenile justice systems are fully compliant with our international human rights obligations by raising the minimum age of imprisonment.
6. Provide sufficient funding targeted to achieve the Closing the Gap outcomes, prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to deliver services wherever possible. Government departments to step up with significant and consistent resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community health and wellbeing services, designed to achieve a closing of the gap in health, education, mental health and social outcomes. There needs to be adequate resourcing of remote communities.
7. First People languages to be preserved, taught and incorporated into civic functions. True bilingual education to become a reality for First Peoples where English is not a first language.
8. That all Governments redouble their efforts to address Target 13 in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which is to reduce the rate of all forms of family violence against First Nations women and children by at least 50% by 2031.

3) Asylum Seekers, Refugees & Migrants

In 2025, Australia will grant its one millionth refugee visa since 1947. This is a powerful reminder of how many lives have been rebuilt in Australia, and how deeply refugees have shaped the country that is Australia today. Across the country, people who arrived as refugees, or whose parents or grandparents came through the program, are now part of every community. Australia’s embrace of migrants and their culture has helped shape the country into a vibrant, prosperous democracy.

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/media-advisories/2025/05/youth-justice-systems-across-australia-crisis-un-experts>

“To welcome the stranger” is a core Christian principle, particularly in the context of migration and encounters with those fleeing persecution. It is rooted in the teachings of Jesus, in Matthew 25:35, which states, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me”. This is why Churches are motivated to call on the Australian government to develop a more just, humane and timely system for assessing claims for asylum.

The 2020 UPR report listed almost 20 recommendations specific to asylum seekers with many others also referencing asylum seekers.

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, Australia pledged to “gradually increase Australia’s Humanitarian Program ... allowing us to highlight the ways in which humanitarian entrants enrich Australian society and boost the economy with their skills, talent and diverse cultural backgrounds”.¹⁴ Since February 2023, over 20,000 refugees who had been left for years on temporary protection visas in Australia have been granted permanent residency - this is a positive development.

Australia can do more

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that in 2020 there were over 4 million refugees in the Asia-Pacific region, which does not include people internally displaced in their own country. Australia must step up to increase its refugee intake to meet current worldwide demand. In the period between 2012 to 2022, Australia recognised or resettled only 0.75% of the 23.99 million refugees who were recognised or resettled around the world in that time. Australia can and must do more.

Discrimination against those arriving by sea

Australia continues to take a hardline approach to people arriving by boat to seek asylum, adopting a policy of deterrence and punishment towards those seeking asylum via sea. These policies have breached international law.

People seeking asylum are detained indefinitely in offshore detention. Despite the release of children from detention, there remains a number of refugees who were transferred offshore to PNG and Nauru. The current dispute between Australia and PNG about responsibility for the welfare of these people has resulted in homelessness and destitution for stateless refugees who are not permitted to work or receive income support. It is not a fair process for permanent protection for people seeking safety in Australia

Australia must prioritise just and compassionate policies for refugees and people seeking asylum. Approximately 8,500 people who sought protection in Australia 12 to 15 years ago and whose cases have not been resolved are still living in limbo in the community, including being denied the right to work, study or access support from the Australian government. We call on the Australian government to ensure that this cohort is treated humanely and allowed to support themselves through work and/or access to appropriate levels of government support. Permit parents whose children were born as Australian citizens to remain with their children and grant them permanent visas.

¹⁴ <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/pledges-contributions/multi-stakeholder-pledges-2023/multi-stakeholder-pledge-resettlement>

We appreciate the abolition of fast-track policy and Immigration Assessment Authority, and introducing the Administrative Review Tribunal. There is now the need to provide a pathway to permanency for people previously rejected through the “fast-track” process, acknowledging both the changed circumstances and country conditions and their strong connection to the Australia community. Ensure that all people seeking protection have a valid Bridging Visa with work rights and Medicare, enabling people who can support themselves to do so.

Migration Amendment Bill 2024

The Migration Amendment Bill 2024 passed by the Australian Parliament on 28 November 2024 fails to meet the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Parliament passed three controversial migration bills, increasing powers to deport non-citizens, reverse refugee protection, enact travel bans and enforce strict detention measures, including confiscating phones.

The Australian Government now has the power: to pay undisclosed third countries to take non-citizens, including recognised refugees with Australian citizen family members, without any safeguards to prevent any harm, detention or return to persecution; to imprison people who will not return to countries where they fear for their lives; to create travel bans on citizens trying to visit Australia for study, business, tourism or to see family, in an effort to pressure their governments into accepting forced returns; to reverse refugees’ protection findings in order to remove them from Australia, and to seize mobile phones and conduct unwarranted searches on people in immigration detention.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has raised significant concerns about the Migration Amendment Act 2024, with the expansion of powers to deport individuals to unspecified third countries having the potential to undermine human rights protections.

There is an increasing trend toward excluding migrants (including expanded and extended waiting periods for new permanent residents) from social security and basic social protections afforded to other residents and citizens. This includes access to social security and family payments, childcare subsidies, paid parental leave, subsidised education, etc. This discrimination risks creating a two-tier society, in which one class of residents are denied the basic supports and protections that citizens and other residents take for granted.

Recommendations

1. Australia should work proactively with nations in Asia-Pacific and with agencies working on the ground to ensure that refugees and people seeking asylum moving through the region are safe, are protected from human trafficking and exploitation, have access to services, have their claims assessed and can begin to rebuild their lives.
2. Increase Australia’s humanitarian intake of refugees through the expansion of Australia’s Refugees and Humanitarian Intake Program. Australia has the ability and the community support to offer more people safety. We’re calling for an increase to the Refugee and Humanitarian Program to 27,000 places per year plus an additional 10,000 community sponsorship places, so that more families have the chance to rebuild their lives in safety.

3. Move to a fair, robust and timely process for assessing the protection claims of people seeking asylum that includes a pathway to permanency for all asylum seekers failed by Australia's flawed asylum processes, including those subjected to the Fast Track system; work rights for all asylum seekers while claims are processed, and one visa that extends until claims are processed—ending the bureaucratic nightmare of applying for a new visa every three to six months.
4. That those found to be refugees are granted permanent protection so they can begin to rebuild their lives and contribute to Australian society.
5. That legislative safeguards are enacted to protect against arbitrary and indefinite detention in Australia, including for refugees whose visas are cancelled but cannot return to their country of origin due to the risk of persecution or refusal of states to readmit them. This includes those who were held in Nauru and PNG who are now in Australia but do not have another country to be resettled in.
6. A review of the Migration Amendment Bill 2024 is required.
7. New permanent residents should be eligible for social security and other basic protections immediately upon having their permanency granted.
8. All asylum seekers awaiting determination of their applications for refugee status should be entitled to basic support while their cases are considered.

Migrant workers

9. The Australian government introduce a national labour hire licencing scheme based on the models that already exist in Victoria and Tasmania;
10. That the Australian government establish a covert investigation unit within the Fair Work Ombudsman to conduct operations to detect and prosecute employers exploiting migrant workers;
11. That workers on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme be given access to Medicare;
12. That the Australian government establish an independent regulator with sufficient resources and powers to govern registered migration agents and police those illegally selling migration advice to reduce exploitation of migrant workers;

13. Stronger national labour rights protections for migrant and seasonal workers, including guaranteed minimum wages, collective bargaining rights, and protection from deportation for speaking out.

4) Homelessness and the Right to a Home

There was one recommendation on the right to a home in the previous UPR, primarily concerned with housing for Indigenous people. And yet, homelessness is a widespread and serious issue in Australia — on any given night, 122,494 people in Australia are homeless¹⁵ however the number is likely much higher given the numbers of people not recorded as “no fixed address” and the increasing impact of a tight rental market.

Affordability

Housing affordability in Australia has collapsed, with the average house cost equivalent to 16.5 years of the average household income. This puts home ownership out of reach for many new home buyers. This is fuelled in part by tax incentive policies, as well as an undersupply of houses due to critical shortages of skilled labour and the increasing cost of building materials and construction costs. This is creating an intergenerational housing wealth gap, reducing the home purchase opportunity for young people. Many potential buyers are being forced into an expensive rental market, where the cost of private rental accommodation has also increased substantially over recent years.

Anglicare’s 2024 Rental Affordability Snapshot¹⁶ found that affordability has crashed to record lows, to the point that there are no rentals available across Australia that would be affordable for a young person on Youth Allowance. For a single person on the Disability Support Pension or the Age Pension, only 0.1 and 0.2 percent of properties respectively were affordable.

A Grattan Institute report¹⁷ has also found that two-thirds of retirees who rent in the private market live in poverty, including more than three in four single women who live alone. Housing and rental unaffordability means people are at risk of experiencing homelessness, being the most rapidly growing cause of homelessness in the past four years

Rising homelessness across Australia is overwhelming the capacity of services to offer emergency help, with those particularly at risk of homelessness include those who have experienced family and domestic violence, young people, children on care and protection orders, First Nations people, people leaving health or social care arrangements, and older Australians. The link to poverty as a driver to homelessness and housing insecurity is obvious. Tragically, homelessness has now taken the lead as Australia’s largest and most damning disparity in life expectancy.¹⁸

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Estimating Homelessness*. [Link] ↔

¹⁶ <https://www.anglicare.org.au/research-and-advocacy/rental-affordability-snapshot-2024/>

¹⁷ <https://grattan.edu.au/news/how-best-to-help-struggling-retirees/>

¹⁸ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/people-receiving-shs-support-last-year-of-life>

Article 11 of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) outlines a right to housing in the right to an 'adequate standard of living'. Australia signed the ICESCR in 1973 and ratified it without reservations in 1975. The provision recognises "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions". Similarly, The UN's Sustainable Development Goal 11.1 outlines: "By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services..." Housing can be made more accessible to everyone by putting human rights at the heart of housing policies and laws. The key elements of a right to housing encompass: Legal Security of Tenure, Availability of Services, Materials, Facilities and infrastructure; Affordability; Habitability; Accessibility; Location; and Cultural Adequacy¹⁹. The right to housing does not mean that the government must provide houses for the entire population but rather enact laws and policies that are needed to prevent homelessness, prohibit forced evictions, address discrimination, focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, ensure security of tenure to all, and guarantee that everyone's housing is adequate.²⁰ It provides an enabling policy environment for the provision of housing for people's well-being rather than prioritising the profit motive.

Recommendations

1. That the Australian government legislate to establish housing as a human right, protecting the right to shelter and human dignity. Such legislation could uphold the principle of homelessness prevention rather than just providing a homelessness response.
2. A new National Housing and Homelessness Plan is needed to include a comprehensive package of interventions, coordinated between all levels of government and the private sector, that supports rental tenants, as well as aspiring homeowners. Legislation should provide for a rights-based approach by the institutions required to support the Plan.
3. Increase investment in public and social housing to address chronic under-supply.

5) Family, Domestic and Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence was reflected in over 30 recommendations in the previous UPR, primarily concerned with measures to reduce the incidence of violence against women and children. Despite concerted efforts by government with a National Plan²¹ that commits to ending gender-based violence within a generation; such violence remains a serious and widespread concern and human rights abuse. It affects all communities and cultures. The following statistics paint a harrowing picture: 2 in 5 women (39%) have experienced violence since the age of 15; 1 in 3 women (31%) has experienced physical violence since the age of 15. Gender based violence is much worse in Aboriginal communities. 1 in 16 men

¹⁹ The Human Rights Law Centre cogently argues the value of a rights based approach to housing, see <https://www.hrlc.org.au/app/uploads/2025/02/RightToHousingReport2025.pdf>

²⁰ See https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf

²¹ National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner. On average, one woman is killed in Australia every nine days by a current or former partner.²²

These are not just statistics: they represent the experience of real people every day. Nevertheless, there have been slow but significant improvements across many of the key measures of progress in the prevention of violence against women.

- Australians' attitudes and understandings of violence against women and gender inequality have improved significantly in recent years²³
- While violence against women remains a national emergency, the prevalence of physical and intimate partner violence has decreased over the past decade.
- There is still significant work to do across Australia to end violence against women and their children.²⁴
- There are non-physical forms of gender-based violence where reported prevalence has increased. There have been some promising advances with several states having now made coercive control illegal and there has been progress on researching and implementing safeguards against financial abuse.²⁵

It is a human right for all people to live free from fear of gender-based violence. However, women escaping violence have few resources and choices. They usually end up in a continuous housing loop - sleeping rough, couch surfing, staying with friends and family, moving to crisis accommodation and back again, or returning to an unsafe home. The link between violence and poverty is well established.²⁶ The choices, and the consequences, are very stark for women wanting to escape domestic violence.

While the causes of family and domestic violence are complex, alcohol is a risk factor involved in 23–65% of all family violence incidents reported to police in Australia.²⁷ The lack of restrictions on late night home delivery of alcohol is particularly associated with family and domestic violence.²⁸ The risk of lethal intimate partner violence has been found to be significantly heightened by heavy alcohol use.²⁹ Research from 2022 found that 54% of those responsible for intimate partner homicide had alcohol or other drug problems.³⁰ Australian Governments at the Federal, State and Territory level have failed to act on

²² <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/quick-facts#key-statistics-on-violence-against-women>

²³ <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/attitudes-matter-the-2021-national-community-attitudes-towards-violence-against-women-survey-ncas-summary-for-australia/read/>

²⁴ <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/OurWatch-Tracking-progress-report-card-web-AA.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.hopgoodganim.com.au/uploads/images/Coercive-control-reform-tracker-2025.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.violenceorpoverty.com/the-choice>

²⁷ Patrick Noonan, Annabel Taylor and Jackie Burke, *Links Between Alcohol Consumption and Domestic and Sexual Violence Against Women: Key Findings and Future Directions* (Report, No 8, November 2017) 1 <<https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/links-between-alcohol-consumption-and-domestic-and-sexual-violence-against-women-key-findings-and-future-directions/>>.

²⁸ 'Dangerous Practices of On-Demand Alcohol Delivery Companies Place Victorian Children and Vulnerable People at Risk of Harm', *Alcohol Change Vic* (Web Report, 2021) <<https://www.alcoholchangevic.org.au/our-work/research>>;

²⁹ Boxall H, Doherty L, Lawler S, Franks C & Bricknell S 2022. *The "Pathways to intimate partner homicide" project: Key stages and events in male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide in Australia*. Special reports. Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), 10.

<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/special/special-15>

³⁰ *Ibid*

implementing restrictions on alcohol supply and marketing that have been shown to reduce the prevalence and severity of family, domestic and sexual violence.

Recommendations

We commend the Australian Federal and State governments on work to date and call on governments to ensure:

1. there is sufficient funding for crisis supports, and that those supports allow victim-survivors to be physically safe while continuing to be employed, pursue education and be connected.
2. specialist training for key first responders to ensure they can correctly identify person/s in need of protection and respond with meaningful support options.
3. access to safe and secure housing — we need to increase the availability of suitable housing so that all victim-survivors can access support.
4. that children and young people affected by family violence need to be treated as victim-survivors in their own right,³¹ and police, can apply for family violence orders.
5. increased family and domestic violence payments as financial insecurity is a major contributing factor in the decision to leave, stay in or return to a violent relationship.
6. implementation of restrictions on the access and marketing of alcohol that have been shown to reduce family, domestic and sexual violence, including the time after which alcohol cannot be home delivered and the density of home delivery liquor outlets.

6) The Right to Peace

In 1963, the world was on the brink of nuclear war. It was at that time that Pope St. John XXIII issued his groundbreaking encyclical letter, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth). It was a heart-felt plea to the Church and all people of goodwill for an end to war and for the banning of nuclear weapons. He promoted a peace which is grounded in the inalienable and inviolable dignity of every person.³² The need for peace is greater than ever. The best way to build genuine and lasting peace is to build trust between nations.

The UN Declaration on the Right to Peace while not a binding treaty, nevertheless, spells out the importance of the right to peace as underpinning all other human rights. It stresses “that peace is a vital requirement for the promotion and protection of all human rights for all”.³³ In 2024 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, stated: “The right to

³¹ See on the importance of listening to the voice of young people: <https://www.anrows.org.au/conference-2025-young-advocates-statement/>

³² <https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/2024/07/25/social-justice-statement-2024-25/>

³³ <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/2017/en/115405>

peace is the mother of all human rights.”³⁴ We call on the Australian government to deepen its commitment to work for the right to peace.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross³⁵, 120 armed conflicts rage around the world. Given the multicultural and multifaith nature of Australian society, violence that happens overseas can reverberate in Australia. Parts of Australian society have deep roots in the Middle East. In Israel and Gaza, the horrific attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on 7 October 2023, and the disproportionate response in means and methods of warfare authorised by the Government of Israel are keenly felt in the Australian community.

The Australian government’s explicit commitment to multiculturalism and freedom of religion is to be commended including recent appointments of envoys for Antisemitism and Islamophobia, contributing to the work of social cohesion and a peaceful society.

The Christian Churches have a strong tradition of opposing war, seeking to remove its causes and promoting peace. Peace is not only the absence of conflict but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation, and the promotion of socioeconomic development. We support growing calls for Australian foreign policy to embed the principle of human security, including by increasing our foreign aid commitment, upholding international law and by strengthening our diplomatic capability. We call for an increase in government funding at all levels of education and the orienting of schooling to peace building and saving the planet from nuclear destruction.

Nuclear Weapons

Nuclear weapons are a threat to all life on earth. There are 12,000 nuclear weapons in the world with 2000 of them on high alert status. In line with international treaties Australia has joined, the Australian government needs to show its commitment to nuclear disarmament by signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW); and changing our defence policy to explicitly distance Australia from US extended nuclear deterrence.

There are fundamental concerns about the AUKUS nuclear submarine partnership, as it limits Australia’s sovereignty in foreign policy, is against the wishes of our Pacific neighbours, diverts public funds that could be better spent elsewhere, and sets our focus on preparations for war rather than on peace.

Recommendations

We urge the Australian government to:

1. Increase official overseas development aid to meet the UN target of 0.7% of gross national income.

³⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/03/turks-global-update-human-rights-council#:~:text=The%20right%20to%20peace%20is,shared%20destiny%20of%20all%20humanity.>

³⁵ <https://www.icrc.org/en/article/icrc-2024-upholding-humanity-conflict#:~:text=As%20we%20approach%20the%20end,and%20their%20most%20basic%20rights.>

2. Increase investment in diplomacy for peace-making, strengthening ties with Pacific neighbours
3. Instead of increasing defence spending, there should be increased funding for health, education, housing and other social needs. The job seeker and related payments should be increased.
4. Conduct a transparent review of Australia's participation in the AUKUS pact
5. Sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
6. We must protect the right to protest. The right to peaceful legitimate protest is a fundamental human right that allows us to express our views, shape our societies and press for social and legal change.
7. Invest in and promote education for peace.