



HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.

(Reg. No. A0020272M)

Affiliated with the Council of Australian Humanist Societies (CAHS)
and the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), London, UK

GPO Box 1555, Melbourne, VIC 3001
<http://vic.humanist.org.au>

11 August 2013

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Re: Overseas Aid (Millennium Development Goals) Bill 2103.

SUBMISSION FROM THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

The Humanist Society of Victoria (HSV) is a secular organisation whose members foster an ethical, rational and responsible approach to life. HSV supports human rights, democratic processes, and a just and inclusive governance.

HSV seeks to alleviate suffering, to promote well-being and the circumstances where all individuals can attain their full potential. It engages in educational and charitable activities.

The views that follow have been formulated at specially convened group discussions to which all HSV members are invited. Further supportive evidence has been obtained from print publications, the Internet, the mass media and from individuals with relevant experience.

The President, Vice-President and Submissions Conveners of the HSV are authorised to present these views.

The Humanist Society of Victoria congratulates the Australian government on holding this inquiry and we appreciate the opportunity to make a submission regarding the Overseas Aid (Millennium Development Goals) Bill 2013.

Victorian Humanists support the proposed Bill.

There are many potential benefits for our nation in making a firm commitment towards the Millennium Development Goals. International support and cooperation can create opportunities for regional peace and stability, mutual respect and diversity, and shared positive outcomes between nations. Humanitarian aid therefore provides positive outcomes for both recipients and donors.

We offer these general comments in response to issues for consideration within this review:

1. Humanists affirm international human rights as enshrined within the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and other relevant international treaties and principles to which Australia is a signatory. We recognise that these principles place financial and moral obligations upon Australia to do what we can to assist those who may have less opportunity for basic human rights including the right to life, health, welfare, food and water security, justice, housing and environmental sustainability, and economic surety.
2. We support the development of mechanisms that ensure that Australia provides appropriate levels of overseas development assistance.
3. We support the development of a mechanism to ensure that Australia meets the UN Millennium Development Goals and which holds the Parliament accountable to achieve this outcome. Australia is an affluent nation and we see the Millennium Development Goals as a minimal commitment that might hopefully be extended in the future.
4. As a corollary to these points, we strongly endorse the establishment of an Independent Commissioner on Aid Effectiveness, and we ask that this Commissioner be empowered to work cooperatively and collaboratively with government agencies and NGOs in order to develop and maintain effective, impartial and expeditious processes for the oversight and delivery of effective aid.
5. Humanists support the increase of Australian foreign aid to levels that are commensurate with our national commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and at the earliest opportunity, possibly even before the timeline proposed under this inquiry's terms of reference.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours faithfully,

Geoff Allshorn
Co-Convenor, Submissions Committee
Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.