



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Human Rights Sub-Committee

MEDIA RELEASE

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Chair: Senator Michael Forshaw
Sub-Comm. Chair: Ms Kerry Rea MP

Bilateral dialogue key to improving human rights in the Asia Pacific

A new parliamentary report is calling for greater protection of human rights in the Asia Pacific region.

Human Rights sub committee chair Kerry Rea said today there is a clear need to enhance mechanisms for protecting human rights in the region.

“The Asia-Pacific is a diverse and complex region faced with a mosaic of human rights challenges,” Ms Rea said. “Evidence received by the committee indicated that there continue to be many human rights issues that the region must tackle.”

However Ms Rea said that moves towards a regional mechanism to protect human rights must be driven by the countries of the region themselves.

Some Pacific nations have already expressed an interest in the possibility of such a mechanism.

“One way the Sub-Committee sees progress being possible is through the bilateral dialogues particularly through regular briefings to Parliament by government on dialogue outcomes”, Ms Rea said.

To support progress through the bilateral dialogues the sub committee recommends that:

- the Australian delegations to its bilateral human rights dialogues include parliamentary representation from the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade; and
- the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provide the Human Rights Sub Committee with an annual briefing on the outcomes of these dialogues, and on any other bilateral human rights dialogues that may later be established with countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Other key recommendations in the report include:

- AusAID to adopt a human rights based approach to guide the planning and implementation of development aid projects;
- Support for regional ratification of existing UN and other treaties and for meeting other human rights obligations;
- Australian scholarship and educational support for non-government organisations and other civil society organisations in the region; and
- the appointment of an Australian special envoy on human rights to conduct high level consultations on regional human rights cooperation.

For media queries, contact the Sub-Committee Chair, Kerry Rea MP on 07 3893 3488.

For the full report and background information, please visit the inquiry website at

www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/jfact

or contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 2313 or jscfadt@apf.gov.au