



## **Submission No 39**

### **Inquiry into Human Rights and Good Governance Education in the Asia Pacific Region**

**Organisation:** Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

**Contact Person:** Mr Phillip Allars

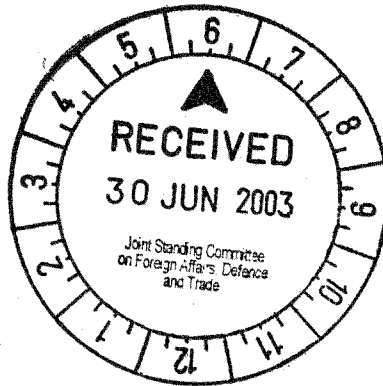
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**FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS AND  
TRADE**

Parliamentary and Media Branch

30 June 2003



Mr Adam Cunningham  
Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Human Right Sub-Committee  
Parliament of Australia

Dear Mr Cunningham

**Human Rights and Good Governance Education in the Asia Pacific**

I refer to your letter of 28 May 2003, regarding DFAT's appearance before the Committee at the public hearing held on Monday, 12 May 2003

Please find attached the responses to the additional questions asked by the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Phillip Allars  
Director Parliamentary Liaison Section

*A key proposal put to the Committee is for the establishment of a National Centre for Human Rights Education. What role would you envisage DFAT and/or AusAID playing this initiative?*

The proposal for the establishment of a National Centre for Human Rights Education has been brought to the Government's attention. A whole-of-government approach is appropriate for consideration of the proposal, which includes the involvement of key departments such as DFAT and AusAID. Whether or not DFAT and AusAID would have an ongoing role in this initiative will be determined in the course of considering the proposal.

*The Friends of the ABC (submission 20) argue that the ABC's Radio Australia is one of the most significant voices for Australia's interest and Australia's relationship in the region. Would an enhanced Radio Australia service assist in promoting human rights and good governance education in the region? How could the existing Radio Australia service best be used to support human rights and good governance in the region?*

Radio Australia offers programs on human rights and governance to audiences in the region. For example, "Time to Talk" is running as a series on Governance in the Pacific, with titles such as "Governance", "Structure of Government", "Community Governance" and "Human Rights". The program is co-produced with Victoria University/Australian National University. Other current Radio Australia programs covering human rights and governance issues are "On the Record" and "Globally Speaking – the Politics of Globalisation".

The Government has recognised the value of Radio Australia's contribution in areas such as this by extending, for a further three years, additional funding of \$2.8 million a year.

Whether or not a further enhanced Radio Australia would advance the process of promoting human rights and good governance depends on many factors, in particular program reception and the resources available to the target audience.

*How much progress has been made toward developing and instituting a National Plan of Action for human rights education?*

The Australian Government is strongly committed to human rights education.

At present, the Government is developing a new National Action Plan on Human Rights (NAP) which will better reflect the Government's human rights priorities. A Working Group, comprised of government departments and agencies, has been meeting since 1999. During this time the Working Group has considered a number of drafts and has incorporated changes suggested by relevant departments and agencies. The latest drafts of the NAP were circulated amongst the Working Group for comment in late 2002. The Attorney-General's department is currently finalising the draft NAP. Once a draft NAP is finalised,

it will be provided to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Attorney-General for their consideration. Upon clearance by the Ministers, the draft NAP will be circulated to State and Territory governments and non-governmental organisations for comment.

The Government also takes the view that a national human rights education strategy can also be developed by those organisations primarily involved in human rights education, namely the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the National Committee on Human Rights Education.

In 1998 the Government provided seed funding for the establishment of the National Committee on Human Rights Education (the Committee) to develop strategies for the effective and coordinated delivery of human rights education throughout Australia, in line with the objectives of the UN Decade of Human Rights Education. The Committee operates as a cooperative venture between relevant government and non-government agencies, business and the community sector. Since its establishment, the Government has provided additional funding to support the Committee's activities. However, the Government considers that funding should not be solely from the Commonwealth, and the Committee is seeking to source funds from a range of private and public sector areas.

In August 2002, the Committee organised a National Strategic Conference on Human Rights Education. Recommendations for follow-up action were released in December 2002 and it is expected that they will provide a framework for developing a coordinated national human rights education strategy.

Further, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission devotes considerable resources to education. Its programmes are designed to respond to perceived gaps in human rights education in Australia. The Commission has developed a structured human rights education program for teachers of upper primary and secondary students. It also undertakes a range of activities raising awareness of human rights issues amongst specific groups such as business or regional Australians.

*How can the impact and effectiveness of human rights and good governance education be better monitored in the region?*

AusAID has well established systems for measuring and improving the quality, effectiveness and impact of its aid activities including human rights and good governance education activities. These systems include monitoring and evaluation regimes specific to each activity as well as inclusion in standardised agency wide processes. The agency wide processes include (but are not limited to) annual completion of Activity Monitoring Briefs, which feed into AusAID's reporting to Parliament, Project Completion Reports, occasional (for example, by random sampling) inclusion in independent ex-post evaluation or Quality Assurance Group studies.

*The National Committee for Human Rights Education (Submission 4) argue that human rights education should be included as a specific agenda item in the human rights consultations with bilateral dialogue partners. Should human rights education be given more prominence in our bilateral human rights dialogues? Does DFAT consult bodies such as the National Committee in developing the agenda for bilateral human rights dialogues?*

As it does with other bodies with an interest in the bilateral human rights dialogues, DFAT invites contributions from the National Committee for Human Rights Education on the dialogues' agendas. In the case of China, it is our understanding that the National Committee has its own engagement with relevant Chinese counterparts on Human Rights Education and there has consequently been less need for the China dialogue itself to be employed to further education issues. Only an initial dialogue session has taken place so far with Vietnam and Iran. As engagement with these countries deepens, human rights education will be an issue to be considered as part of the dialogues themselves and any mutually agreed technical cooperation programs.

*Given that other Commonwealth agencies such as Attorney Generals (and HREOC) also have a role to play in human rights and good governance education, are cross departmental initiatives effectively coordinated?*

There is a range of initiatives coordinated across Departments. The Attorney General's Department is involved in:

- the development of a new National Action Plan on human rights.
- the bilateral human rights dialogues Australia has with China, Vietnam and Iran.
- technical cooperation programs, funded by AusAID, with China, Indonesia and Vietnam. These include funding Australian Federal Court judges to travel to the countries to take part in seminars and judicial training, HREOC officers providing technical assistance, and Australia hosting study tours of officials from these countries. AGD generally takes part in the study tour, hosting a round-table on human rights law and practice in Australia. AGD also takes part in planning the technical cooperation, by participating in the dialogues and the Australia Indonesia Ministerial Forum (which the Attorney-General attends).
- a number of IDCs and cross-government initiatives that have some degree of human rights focus such as the IDC on services and programs for mature aged Australians and the National Youth Agenda, National Agenda for Early Childhood and National Plan of Action for Children, and the National Committee for Human Rights Education Policy and Programs Reference Group.

*What support does Australia provide to the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions?*

Australia has provided around \$2.4 million to the Asia Pacific Forum to date, including \$500,000 for financial year 2002-03. This has included annual core funding for the management and administrative costs of the APF Secretariat, with additional funding provided for specific activities such as thematic workshops and video production.

*Do you consider the lack of a regional human rights mechanism as a significant obstacle to effective and sustainable human rights and good governance education in the region? What is Australia's position on this issue?*

Australia funds the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF), which is an important mechanism for regional cooperation on human rights in the Asia Pacific region. The APF assists countries in Asia and the Pacific to set up and improve national human rights institutions. It also helps these institutions to cooperate on human rights issues of common concern. The APF conducts annual meetings that bring together human rights institutions, the United Nations, government and non-government organisations to consider regional approaches to addressing human rights. It also provides training on key human rights themes for staff from human rights institutions, as well as individuals from government and non-government organisations engaged in promoting and protecting human rights.