

Introduction

The inquiry

- 1.1 On 14 September 2000, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer MP, asked the Committee to inquire into and report on the link between aid and human rights.¹
- 1.2 The Committee called for submissions on this subject in November 2000, in a national newspaper and on the Internet. It also wrote to a wide range of non-government organisations (NGOs), Government agencies, the Churches and individuals with an interest in the subject.²
- 1.3 The Committee decided to take evidence for this inquiry at a seminar, with the participating organisations selected from those that had forwarded submissions. This seminar was held in Canberra on Thursday, 5 July 2001 and, including the list of participants, the transcript of the proceedings is at Appendix A.
- 1.4 This inquiry attracted a total of 31 submissions, listed at Appendix B.
- 1.5 Additional material received during the inquiry is listed at Appendix C.

Previous reports

- 1.6 This report should be seen against the background of a considerable and long-standing Committee interest in both aid and human rights. Since its

1 The terms of reference for this inquiry are at page ix. There is some debate about the appropriate term to use: 'aid' or 'development assistance' or 'overseas development assistance' (ODA). This report will use the shortest version, knowing that some readers will not be comfortable with this usage.

2 The inquiry was advertised in *The Weekend Australian*, 18/19 November 2000, p. 10, and again in *The Australian* on 6 February 2001, p. 2.

first report on the subject in 1973, a significant number of the Committee's reports has considered Australia's aid program and related topics. Since 1992, a number of additional reports has also examined Australia's efforts to promote and protect human rights around the world, in its region and in particular countries. These reports are all listed at Appendix D.³

This report

- 1.7 The Committee took the view that the limited terms of reference for this inquiry made it appropriate only to hold one public hearing, in the form of a seminar with invited participants. It also believed that, because the seminar process did not provide the usual opportunity to analyse publicly the material included in submissions, it was not appropriate to make recommendations in this report.
- 1.8 Nevertheless, the Committee has drawn some conclusions which it offers as contributions to the discussion on the Australian aid program. It believes that the differences in the views put forward, at the seminar on 5 July in particular, should not distract attention from the fact that there is a great deal of agreement about the major issues.
- 1.9 While the inquiry's terms of reference were limited, they dealt with substantial issues and, to an extent, it is artificial to address them separately. However, this has been done to ensure that, as far as practicable, all the views expressed to the Committee are reflected in this report.
- 1.10 Chapter 2 sets out the Australian Government's position on aid and human rights, including its overall approach and its views on the 'rights-based' approach to aid.
- 1.11 The following chapters address the three items in the terms of reference for the inquiry:
- activities advancing human rights, in Chapter 3;
 - the value of different means of advancing human rights, in Chapter 4; and
 - activities under various programs, in Chapter 5.
- 1.12 Chapter 6 will summarise the various strands in the debate, including the 'rights-based' approach to aid.
-

3 The Committee was first formed in 1952. A significant number of the reports tabled in the 1990s on relations with other countries, or groups of nations, included chapters on aid and/or human rights.