



Submission No 7

**Review of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Annual Report 2009 - 2010**

Name: Dr Caroline Lambert
Executive Director

Organisation: YWCA Australia –
Women Leading Change



Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: jscfadt@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Review of *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2009-2010*

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the review of the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2009-2010 (DFAT Annual Report)*.

About us

YWCA Australia is the national association of YWCAs in Australia and is part of the World YWCA movement. We are a women-led organisation that achieves positive change by providing advocacy, programs and services for women, families and communities. YWCAs undertake advocacy and deliver programs and services that develop the leadership and collective power of women and girls; support individuals, their families and communities at critical times; and promote gender equality and community strengthening.

One of our priorities is promoting the human rights of women in Australia and internationally.

Human rights and Australian foreign and trade policy

We note that human rights are only mentioned briefly in the DFAT Annual Report and there is no reference to women's human rights or gender equality in the report.

Commitment to human rights is an underlying principle of Australia's engagement with the international community. "[E]nhancing our domestic and international engagement on human rights issues" is also a key principle of the Australian Government's National Human Rights Framework. Despite these principles, DFAT does not have an explicit policy on human rights and foreign affairs and trade.

YWCA Australia therefore recommends that DFAT develops and implements an integrated, comprehensive policy on human rights and foreign affairs and trade to embed human rights into the operations of all areas of the department. The policy should set out the human rights objectives of the department, the specific actions that will be used to achieve these objectives, with clear performance reporting against these goals and actions in DFAT's future annual reports.

We also support Australia developing and undertaking Gender and Human Rights Impact Assessments in the context of international trade agreements, and negotiating for bilateral and multilateral agreements to include human rights clauses and safeguards.

The human rights policy and work of DFAT should also be included in the National Human Rights Action Plan that is currently being developed by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department.

Women's human rights and Australian foreign and trade policy

As securing human rights for women and girls is fundamental to achieving a safe and prosperous domestic and international environment, the DFAT human rights and foreign affairs and trade policy should include a clear commitment to substantive gender equality in all areas of operations. The policy should also set out specific objectives relating to women's human rights and gender equality, and state the specific actions that will be used to achieve these goals, with performance reporting.

We refer the Committee to the Netherlands' human rights and foreign affairs policy¹ which is a useful model. The Netherlands' policy focuses on six areas of human rights, including women's human rights, and includes strategic initiatives such as:

- “Alongside the Netherlands' enhanced efforts on other non-discrimination issues, the rights of women will receive prominent attention in its bilateral relations. The Human Rights Ambassador² will pay particular attention to this issue during his visits to other countries.”
- “The Netherlands will actively encourage compliance with the UN resolution on violence against women, at both national and international level, and within the UN itself.”

A Human Rights Ambassador

We support the establishment of an Australian Human Rights Ambassador to promote human rights across all areas of foreign policy and trade. We note that countries such as the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, France and Spain have human rights ambassadors, that Germany has a Commissioner for Human Rights Policy whose functions are broadly the same, and that Canada may also introduce a human rights ambassador.³

A Women's Rights Ambassador

YWCA Australia also recommends that the Australian Government establish an Australian Ambassador for Women's Rights to promote gender equality, work to eliminate violence against women and girls, and strengthen efforts to enhance women's political participation in the Asia-Pacific region.

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Human dignity for all: a human rights strategy for foreign policy*, November 2007, available at <http://www.dutchembassyuk.org/images/document/121.pdf>

² The post of Human Rights Ambassador is discussed below.

³ Human Rights Law Centre, *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Foreign Policy*, April 2011, 38-42, available at <http://www.hrlc.org.au/files/HRLC-Submission-to-Inquiry-into-DFAT-Annual-Report.pdf>

Increasing resources

DFAT is currently under-funded and under-resourced (including both staff based in Australia and staff based in overseas missions), jeopardising the achievement of Australia's international policy goals.

In November 2010 speech, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, stated that "[t]he truth is, DFAT was starved for a decade" and that despite some improvement, "... I am acutely conscious of a core fact: we now have 18% fewer staff abroad than we did in 1996 while, in the rest of the APS, there are now 12% more staff. I am also conscious of the fact that of all G20 countries, Australia has the smallest diplomatic footprint of all, with posts in less than half the capitals of the world."⁴ In March 2009, the Lowy Institute for International Policy's Blue Ribbon Panel Report, *Australia's Diplomatic deficit: Reinvesting in our instruments of international policy*, described that "[y]ears of underfunding have diminished its policy capacity and rendered many overseas missions critically overstretched".⁵

YWCA Australia calls on the Australian Government to provide more funding and resourcing to DFAT as a whole ensure that it can properly carry out its critical functions. We are particularly concerned about the significant under-resourcing of the DFAT Human Rights & Indigenous Section. As we understand it, this section currently has one Director and four policy officers, one of whom is usually a graduate recruit on rotation. We also understand that usually not all four positions are filled at the same time.

Human rights education and training for DFAT staff

The National Human Rights Framework states: "Promoting a stronger focus on human rights in the public sector through education and training, particularly for decision makers and policy developers, is critical for increased awareness and understanding about human rights issues."⁶ It is our view that all departmental officers and staff should receive regular human rights education and training, including specific training on women's human rights and gender equality.

More information

We also commend the Human Rights Law Centre's April 2011 submission to this review, *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Foreign Policy*, to the Committee.

⁴ The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs. Speech: "The Future of the Australian Foreign Service", Canberra, 18 November 2010, available at http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2010/kr_sp_101118.html

⁵ Lowy Institute for International Policy, *Australia's Diplomatic Deficit: Reinvesting in our instruments of international policy*, Blue Ribbon Panel Report, March 2009, viii.

⁶ Australian Government, *Australia's Human Rights Framework*, April 2010, 6, available at [http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/%283A6790B96C927794AF1031D9395C5C20%29~Human+Rights+Framework.pdf/\\$file/Human+Rights+Framework.pdf](http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/%283A6790B96C927794AF1031D9395C5C20%29~Human+Rights+Framework.pdf/$file/Human+Rights+Framework.pdf)

Please contact us on (03) 9349 3711 or ed@ywca.org.au if you have any questions or would like more information.

Yours faithfully



Dr. Caroline Lambert
Executive Director



Alison Laird
Policy Coordinator

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