

Submission to the Inquiry into the provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Bill (No. 2) 2005
11/11/2005

Dear Senators

I am deeply disturbed by the new provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Bill (No. 2) 2005. While I am pleased that the Parliament has been given a bit more time to examine the government's new terrorism laws, I believe the process has been far too rushed for adequate public scrutiny and comment. There has not been nearly enough time for the general public to even be fully informed about their potential loss of civil liberties, let alone time for this information to be digested.

I believe that a strong case for the need for these new laws has not been made by the Government. There are already sufficient laws to allow authorities to take action against threats to our security and these new laws are therefore completely unnecessary. These laws put our most basic civil liberties at risk for no effective reason.

Even the most basic of our democratic freedoms, that we are all presumed innocent until proven guilty is threatened! This removal of the presumption of innocence, along with other provisions in the new laws such as allowing arbitrary detention and limited judicial review contravenes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Australia is a signatory. The Government has shown no interest in explaining how these new laws will affect our international standing in human rights and how they will stand up to scrutiny against both the above International Covenant or even to the UN Commission on Human rights.

These new laws rely on a very broad and undefined understanding of the term "terrorism". I am deeply concerned that without a clearer definition of what constitutes "terrorism" that these laws could be used against proponents of many different social and political movements. Any person that this, or subsequent governments, deem as unsavoury could be detained and prosecuted under these laws. As these laws give far too much power to authorities without adequate checks and balances they are highly prone to abuse by officials either now or in the future. Any one who disagrees with government policy is potentially at risk of these laws being used against them.

Journalists will be particularly at risk under the new sedition provisions as our rights to free and open speech is being put under threat and media personnel who seek to research and analyse public policy will be in the firing line.

These news laws will give authorities the right to imprison citizens without charge, previously only a hallmark of totalitarian states, we cannot let it also become a hallmark of our own country! If we are to retain the democratic principles that we have grown to consider sacrosanct then we must not let this new legislation pass through parliament and be the death knell of our democracy.

I urge the Senate Committee to reject these new terrorism laws. These are laws that threaten our very society, but do nothing to really improve our security.