

Another mark against Australia's name at the United Nations

The tide of condemnation against Australia's human rights record is rising, with the United Nations expert panel on racial discrimination, criticising Australia's failure to combat racism in a report released overnight.

Despite being a nation committed to fairness and multiculturalism, the poisonous effect of racism is a growing problem in Australia – one that causes immense pain to racial and ethnic minority communities, and which threatens to tear our social fabric apart.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about the deterioration in Australia's treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ethnic minority communities, refugees and people seeking asylum.

The Committee warned that “expressions of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia, including in the public sphere and political debates as well as the media, are on the rise.”

The Committee urged the Australian Government to:

- bring every person held offshore to safety in Australia;
- respect the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- invest in anti-racism measures and appropriate services for people from ethnic minority communities; and
- reform youth justice systems around Australia and raise the age of criminal responsibility.

Quotes from NGO representatives

Rod Little, Co-Chair, National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

“The Committee has reiterated our demands and called on Australia to introduce an urgent ‘paradigm shift’ to demonstrate a true commitment to the fundamental rights of the First Peoples of Australia and ensure that aspirational plans become a reality.”

“National Congress, on behalf of its members and our NGO collaboration, calls on all Australian Governments to receive this report with a genuine willingness to engage more with us. Our peoples, communities and organisations are ready to respond. Let's work together to ensure the right approaches are taken to enable our people, and the generations to come, to enjoy life with dignity and equal rights and freedoms. Together we must shape a future where we can all live without racism and discrimination.”

Wayne Muir, Co-Chair, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

“The UN panel of experts on racism has echoed our calls for urgent action to address the high rate of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We call on the Government to urgently implement a national justice target, as part of the Closing the Gap framework, implement the recommendations of the NT Royal Commission and a national plan to reform youth justice systems, and ensure greater investment in community-led solutions to address the root causes and consequences of the criminalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

Mary Patetsos, Chairperson, Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils Australia

“The Committee has made important recommendations which the Australian Government should implement to strengthen Australia's multicultural society. We look forward to collaborating with the

Government to challenge racism and intolerance and ensure the equitable treatment of all Australians no matter their cultural or linguistic background.”

Les Malezer, Chair, FAIRA and member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

“Equality and non-discrimination must be core Australian values in our contemporary society. It has been more than 50 years since Australia signed the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. If Australia is serious about upholding its international obligations, it must embed non-discrimination standards in the Constitution and energetically engage with civil society and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to respond to the findings and recommendations in this report.”

Hannah McGlade, Director, Aboriginal Family Law Service

“Aboriginal women and children experience severe human rights violations at an alarming rate. This is reflected in very high incarcerations and child removal rates. The UN Committee has called on Australia to support Aboriginal-led solutions, like the ‘Family Matters’ campaign, to appoint Aboriginal Children’s Commissioners in every jurisdiction and to implement the forthcoming report of the Australian Law Reform Commission to reduce the incarceration and criminalisation of Aboriginal women.”

Alina Leikin, Lawyer, Human Rights Law Centre

“Australia is the only Western Democracy in the world which fails to protect the rights of all its people in law. All Australians are at risk of having their rights violated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from minority communities and those seeking our protection are particularly vulnerable. Now that Australia has a seat on the Human Rights Council, it must get its own house in order and ensure that no one slips through the cracks.”

Shahleena Musk, Senior Lawyer, Human Rights Law Centre

“Australia continues to lock up children as young as 10, falling behind the rest of the world and condemning children to prison instead of supporting them in the community. The evidence is in and it couldn’t be clearer – medical professionals, human rights experts, the Northern Territory Royal Commission and now the United Nations expert panel on racism have demanded that Australia raise the age of criminal responsibility. Children should be in schools and playgrounds, not prisons.”

The concluding observations, [can be found here](#).

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