

## **Joint statement of concern regarding suspension of UN Subcommittee on Torture visit to Australia following lack of co-operation in New South Wales and Queensland**

We express profound concern that the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) has been forced to take the drastic measure of suspending its visit to Australia due to obstruction encountered while attempting to carrying out its mandate during its visit to Australia under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

We strongly condemn decisions to refuse to allow the SPT to access New South Wales detention facilities and Queensland inpatient units and to provide the SPT with requested information and documentation.

This obstruction is a clear breach by Australia of its obligations under OPCAT. States parties have an obligation to both receive the SPT in their territory and allow it to exercise its mandate in full, including by allowing unfettered access to places of detention.

OPCAT is designed to protect the fundamental human rights of people detained in places including, but not limited to, prisons, juvenile detention centres, immigration detention centres, hospitals, mental health facilities, aged care facilities and facilities for people with disability.

The ability to carry out unannounced visits to detention facilities, conduct private interviews with people deprived of their liberty and review documentation is an essential element of the framework established under OPCAT.

We therefore condemn in the strongest possible terms decisions that necessarily serve to obstruct or impede the preventive mandate of the SPT which is focused on a proactive approach to preventing the torture and ill treatment of vulnerable adults and children.

Governments that are committed to the protection and promotion of international human rights standards in places of detention have nothing to fear from the granting of SPT access to all places of detention.

Such access facilitates the delivery of confidential expert recommendations to authorities that serve to strengthen protections against torture in their jurisdictions – an outcome that governments in a developed modern democracy such as Australia should both encourage and welcome.

Given that OPCAT applies to all federal states without limitations or exceptions, it is concerning that four years after Australia ratified OPCAT so little progress has been made to ensure consistent implementation of OPCAT obligations across all states and territories.

We are deeply concerned that the approach taken in New South Wales and Queensland is a harbinger for future refusals to cooperate with regular preventive visits to places of detention by the independent National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) Australia is obliged to establish pursuant to implementing OPCAT.

Recalling that the right to be free from torture is a non-derogable norm of international law, we call the New South Wales and Queensland governments to affirm their commitment to the rules-based international legal system, reconsider their decisions to block access to places of detention and to instead co-operate fully with the SPT.

We further call on all jurisdictions across Australia to consider the recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Road Map to OPCAT Compliance](#) and, where they are yet to legislate, commit to the urgent introduction of overarching legislation to translate Australia's OPCAT obligations into domestic law

Signatories over page

Media Contact: **Matt Mitchell, ALHR media manager 0431 980 365.**

Kerry Weste, President, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights



Steven Caruana, Coordinator, Australia OPCAT Network

A/Children's Commissioner, Office of the Children's Commissioner – Northern Territory



Sophie McNeil, Australia Researcher, Human Rights Watch



Keren Adams, Acting CEO, Human Rights Law Centre



Mat Tinkler, Group CEO, Save the Children Australia



James McDougall, Convenor, Australian Child Rights Taskforce



Sebastian Zagarella, CEO, People with Disability Australia



Cheryl Axleby, Co-Chair Change The Record



Damian Giffis, CEO, First Peoples Disability Network



Professor Melissa Castan, Director Castan Centre for Human Rights Law



Professor Dr Megan Davis, Balnaves Chair in Constitutional Law, Director, Indigenous Law Centre and Professor of Law, UNSW Law & Justice



Dr Mindy Sotiri, Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative



Kelley Temple, Advocacy Manager, Community Legal Centres Australia



Community Legal Centres  
Australia

Cassandra Goldie, CEO, Australian Council of Social Service



Katrina Ironside, Executive Director, Community Legal Centres NSW



Jana Favero, Director - Advocacy and Campaigns, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre



Karly Warner, CEO, Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT Limited



George Newhouse, Director, National Justice Project



Greg Barns SC, National Criminal Justice Spokesman, Australian Lawyers Alliance



Brett Collins, Coordinator, Justice Action



Debbie Kilroy OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Sisters Inside Inc.



Carolyn Frohmader, Executive Director, Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)



TasOPCAT, Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies, University of Tasmania

Jozefa Sobski AO, National Convenor, Women's Electoral Lobby



Associate Professor Mary Anne Kenny, SCALES Community Legal Centre



Dr Gemma Killen, Acting CEO, ACT Council of Social Service Inc



Aimee McVeigh, CEO, Queensland Council of Social Service



Joanna Quilty, CEO, New South Wales Council of Social Service





Adrienne Picone, CEO, Tasmanian Council of Social Service



Matilda Alexander, CEO, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion



Josh Pallas, President, New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties



Camilla Pandolfini, Principal Solicitor, Public Interest Advocacy Centre



Kate Swaffer, Human Rights Advisor, Dementia Alliance International



Greg McIntyre SC, President, International Commission of Jurists (Western Australian Branch)



Human Rights Act for New South Wales Alliance



Centre for Law and Social Justice at the University of Newcastle



**CENTRE FOR  
LAW AND  
SOCIAL  
JUSTICE**

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Dr Sharon Shalev, SolitaryConfinement.org

Sarah Dale, Centre Director & Principal Solicitor - Refugee Advice & Casework Service



Professor Justine Nolan, Australian Human Rights Institute, UNSW Sydney



Scientia Professor Jane McAdam AO, Director of the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW Sydney

Madeline Gleeson, Senior Research Fellow, Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW Sydney



Tabitha Lean & Debbie Kilroy, National Network of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls

Ms Wendy Prowse, CEO, Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service



Vasili Maroulis, Principal Solicitor, Marrickville Legal Service



Alison Battison, Director Principal, Human Rights For All



Robin Banks and Michael Small, Directors, Equality Building



Jonathon Budgeon, Deputy Chair, Prisoners Legal Service Tasmania



Dulce Munoz down, National Convenor, Mums 4 Refugees



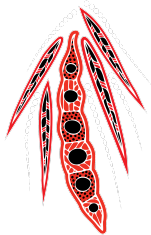
Helen Blaber, Director, Principal Solicitor. Prisoners' Legal Service (Qld)



Paige Armstrong, Chief Executive Officer, Queenslanders with Disability Network



Professor Megan Williams, Girra Maa Indigenous Health Discipline, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney



Mary Mallett, CEO, Disability Advocacy Network Australia Ltd. (DANA)



Karen Fletcher, Executive Officer, Flat Out



Professor Larissa Behrendt, University of Technology Sydney, Director of Research and Academic Programs Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research



Malcolm Baalman, Senior Policy and Advocacy Adviser, Public Health Association of Australia



**Public Health Association**  
AUSTRALIA

Elizabeth Evatt AC

Professor Emeritus Ron McCallum AO former Chair of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Committee

Professor Edward Santow, UTS (Australian Human Rights Commissioner 2016-2021)

Professor Mary Crock, Sydney Law School, The University of Sydney

Professor Larissa Behrendt, University of Technology Sydney, Director of Research and Academic Programs Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research

Professor Bronwyn Naylor, Graduate School of Business and Law, RMIT University.

Associate Professor Hannah McGlade, Member, UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues

Professor Ben Saul, Challis Chair of International Law, The University of Sydney

Paul Silva, Nephew of David Dungay Jr

Latoya Aroha Rule, National Ban Spit hoods Coalition, family of Wayne Fella Morrison & Research Associate - University of Technology Sydney

Carmel Lee, Barrister, Greenway Chambers

Greg McIntyre SC, Barrister, Michael Kirby Chambers

Dr Piers Gooding, Senior Research Fellow, Melbourne Law School

Julian Trollor, Chair, Intellectual Disability Mental Health & Head, Department of Developmental Disability Neuropsychiatry, Professor and NHMRC Leadership Fellow Discipline of Psychiatry and Mental Health, UNSW Medicine & Health

Kate Swaffer, Independent Researcher and Campaigner, Honorary Associate Fellow, Faculty of Science, Medicine & Health, University of Wollongong

Associate Professor Laura Grenfell, Law School, University of Adelaide

Lorana Bartels, Professor of Criminology, Australian National University; Adjunct Professor of Law, University of Canberra and University of Tasmania.

Prof Thalia Anthony, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Prof Penny Crofts, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Dr Elyse Methven, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Dr Linda Steele, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Dr Eugene Schofield-Georgeson, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Dr Craig Osmond, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Ms Lisa Billington, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Ms Kate Thomas, University of Technology Sydney Faculty of Law

Craig Foster, Former Socceroo

Dr Louis Schetzer, Teaching Fellow, University of New South Wales Law

Professor Simon Rice, OAM, University of Sydney Law School

Associate Professor Amy Maguire, University of Newcastle School of Law and Justice

Professor Melissa Castan, Monash University Law Faculty

Professor David Kinley, Chair of Human Rights Law, FASSA, Sydney Law School, The University of Sydney

Irene Baghoomians, Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney Law School

Simon Katterl, Human Rights and Mental Health Consultant

Professor Philomena Murray. Honorary Professorial Fellow. School of Social and Political Sciences. The University of Melbourne

Professor Irene Watson, Pro Vice Chancellor Aboriginal Leadership and Strategy, and Professor of Law, School of Law, University of South Australia Business School

**END**