



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

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Human Rights
Commission

Te Kāhui Tika Tangata

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Australia New Zealand Race Relations Roundtable, Canberra 2010 Communiqué

The annual Australia New Zealand Race Relations Roundtable was held in Canberra on 10 November 2010. The Race Relations Roundtable includes the Australian and New Zealand National Human Rights Commission and Australian State and Territory Anti-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Commissions. Also in attendance were representatives of a number of community organisations, academics with expertise in racism and cultural diversity, and federal government department observers.

The 2010 Roundtable focused particularly on the recent report of the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD) Committee on racial discrimination in Australia and the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

The CERD Report 2010

Commissioners welcomed the report of the UN CERD Committee and noted the contribution made by NGOs and rights holders to the Committee's proceedings in Geneva. They commended the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations to governments. They called for urgent follow-up action, beginning with the tabling of the report in the Federal Parliament and the appointment of a responsible Minister and lead agency for implementation. They emphasised the importance of engaging state and territory governments and Commissioners at an early stage in the process of implementation.

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Commissioners affirmed the importance of the Declaration as a foundational document for human rights in Australia and New Zealand, which should be used to reset relationships and address serious injustices. They committed to making use of it in their own organisations, to advocate for its implementation and to make it real and relevant to all communities. Guidance on its use by government, corporations and communities is currently being developed. An Asia-Pacific regional workshop on the Declaration will be hosted by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Auckland next month. An Australian national summit on the Declaration is planned for 2012. The Declaration will be used in submissions to government on policy and legislative proposals, and as a tool in concrete situations relating to language, education, natural resources, culture and heritage.

The right to language and cultural identity

In accordance with Article 13 of the Declaration, Commissioners affirmed the importance of language as a human right, and noted its impact on the enjoyment of other human rights including cultural identity and access to justice, education and health (including the availability of professional interpreting services). The critical situation of Indigenous languages in Australia has been highlighted by the 2009 Aboriginal Social Justice Report, the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples and the UN CERD Committee, which called for a national inquiry into Indigenous languages. Commissioners called on federal, state and territory governments to urgently address the endangered state of Indigenous languages, including in education and in the development of the new school curriculum, and the provision of professional interpreting services. They also agreed to work together to promote the protection of the Indigenous languages of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, as well as those of other cultural communities.

National anti-racism strategy

Commissioners supported the call by the UN CERD Committee and the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council for a national anti-racism strategy to counter the harmful economic, social and cultural effects of racism and racial discrimination. This strategic initiative will require political leadership at the highest level and should involve communities and all levels of government at all stages of development. Matters to be considered should include:

- Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the removal of section 25 (of the Australian Constitution) and the insertion of an equality and non-discrimination clause
- raising public awareness of the historical legacy of colonialism and racism in Australia and its continuing effect on Indigenous peoples and all Australians
- strengthening human rights, equality and anti-discrimination legislation
- addressing structural and systemic racism and discrimination
- increasing penalties for race related crimes
- the collection of data sets on the incidence of racism and rigorous data on access to services
- addressing racism in the national curriculum and school environments
- the serious nature of compound discrimination experienced differently across specific groups
- the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity and national language services policy
- the role and impact of the media, including the internet
- a national public awareness campaign to positively affect community behaviours, as has been done with other socially harmful activities such as smoking, family violence and drink driving.

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