

Ambassador for Women and Girls

Panellist in the Annual Discussion on Gender Integration HRC24

10.00-13.00 September 12

Question formulated for the Ambassador for Women and Girls:

Australia is well-known for its excellent track record on integrating a gender perspective in both its UPR submission and making gender-related recommendations when reviewing other country's human rights situation. Could you please let us know how you work with civil society in this process?

As Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls I have had the opportunity to engage with governments, civil society and the UN system on gender issues at an international, regional and bilateral level. Through my work I have come to fully realise that women experience hardship in ways that are differentiated from the male experience, and which is often multiplied by the challenges women face. This is why it is essential that all human rights dialogues, especially those within the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, consider issues from a gender perspective.

States, civil society and the UN system are responsible for working collaboratively to implement fully human rights law and international humanitarian law in order to protect the human rights of women and girls. Women's groups, human rights defenders and non-government organisations all have a vital role in creating awareness of, and protecting, women's rights.

The Universal Periodic Review, or UPR, process is a key mechanism for facilitating the participation of States in the UN human rights system, as well as compliance with and implementation of international human rights commitments and obligations.

Australia actively promotes a gender perspective through inclusion of gender issues in our UPR statements, including recommending:

- implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- increasing women’s empowerment and gender equality in education and employment, including in political and economic life;
- implementing effective measures to address domestic violence, sexual and gender based violence and female genital mutilation; and
- addressing gender discrimination both locally and nationally.

Civil society plays an important role in the preparation of Australia’s statements on other country’s UPR appearance by providing detailed reporting of the situation on the ground; delivering aid to improve human rights; and identifying ways in which States and international organisations can approach gender issues. Australia invites civil society to provide comments and recommendations on priority areas for improvement in countries that will be reviewed through the UPR process in both Geneva and capital. We draw on a range of sources to inform our statements for the UPR process, including open source material, information from our embassies, and civil society’s reporting to ensure we are broadly aware of any range of human rights concerns.

In preparation for our own UPR in 2011, Australia prepared a National Report on our domestic human rights implementation. The report was informed by extensive consultation with communities, civil society and the Australian national human rights institution, the Australian Human Rights Commission.

In preparation for the report, an Independent Committee sought advice and recommendations from civil society and the community in roundtables and public hearings held across Australia, as well as through submissions. The Committee

looked to cast light on the experiences of marginalised and vulnerable groups, including women. Once the report was drafted, we sought civil society's initial views on the draft which were considered when finalising the report. These consultations also formed a Baseline Study of Human Rights in Australia.

The National Report, along with the UPR recommendations, the Baseline Study of Human Rights in Australia and consultations with civil society, informed Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Following consultations with the Australian Human Rights Commission and other NGOs, Australia accepted all of the recommendations made in our UPR in relation to women and gender issues. Implementation of the UPR recommendations through our National Action Plan on Human Rights is the next step in the process.

Australia has fully actioned the recommendation to adopt a *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, including developing a National Centre of Excellence for Women to enhance research efforts around domestic and family violence, and sexual assault. We have also adopted targets of 40 per cent representation of women on public sector boards, and successfully reached this target [41.7 per cent at 30 June 2013]. Finally, we have made further steps to redress remaining gender inequalities, in particular with regard to the employment of women in the private sector. One way we addressed this issue was through a joint project between the Australian Government Office for Women and the Australian Human Rights Commission to boost women's leadership in male-dominated industries.

Australia greatly values the contribution of civil society in the UPR process, and continues this engagement when creating and implementing domestic policies more broadly. The input provided by NGOs in these consultation processes is a critical element in shaping the issues raised by Australian delegations in the discussions in both the UN and in bilateral dialogues. We consult civil society in preparations for

bilateral human rights dialogues, which is particularly useful in the preparation of lists of individual human rights cases handed over with each round of dialogue. We also hold an annual NGO Human Rights Forum to facilitate consultations with civil society more generally to be considered broadly when conducting our work internationally, regionally and bilaterally.

Australia also works closely with the Commission on the Status of Women in evaluating progress on gender equality, identifying challenges, setting global standards and formulating concrete policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. In the lead up to the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, Australia actively engages with the non-government sector to ensure that Australia's priorities reflect a broad range of women's experiences, and to take advantage of a range of cross sectoral expertise and knowledge.

Australia also works closely with the six National Women's Alliances which it funds. These Alliances engage actively with the Australian Government on policy issues as part of a better, more informed and representative dialogue between women and government. We are also harnessing our strong relationships with women's groups in implementing Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. In line with the *Australian National Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, the Women, Peace and Security inter-Departmental Working Group invites three civil society representatives to engage with the working group once a year.

The Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs engages with civil society through governance arrangements under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, and through consultations to inform specific efforts to eliminate violence against women, including in relation to primary prevention, perpetrator interventions, and research and data. The National

Plan itself was also informed by extensive national community consultation prior to its release in 2011.

Australia also conducts public consultations, including with civil society, on every major domestic policy proposal. We also have regular informal consultations with civil society which includes responding to general correspondence on a regular basis. Advisory groups that include civil society are also used to inform the development of policy; this was very useful in the recent development of the Recognition of Gender Guidelines.

Although Australia has made progress towards achieving greater gender equality, we recognise that there is more work to be done, and we will continue to work with civil society to this end.