

Introduction

Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.1 The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (the Committee) initially commenced an inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Dialogues under its annual report powers on 23 June 2011, and advertised the inquiry nationally.
- 1.2 On 25 June 2011, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, asked the Committee to inquire into and report on the effectiveness of Australia's Human Rights Dialogues with China and Vietnam (the dialogues).
- 1.3 The Committee invited an array of stakeholders, and groups and individuals with established interest in human rights to submit to the inquiry, including relevant government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs), and civil society¹ groups in Australia.
- 1.4 The Committee received 23 submissions and 17 exhibits from a range of groups and individuals within Australia and the region.

1 The World Bank defines Civil Society as referring to: *the term civil society to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organisations: community groups, non-government organisations, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations.* World Bank, 'Defining Civil Society', viewed on 29 March 2012, <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,,contentMDK:20101499~menuPK:244752~pagePK:220503~piPK:220476~theSitePK:228717,00.html>>

- 1.5 A considerable amount of evidence contained within the submissions include names and case information for individuals alleged to be subjected to human rights violations in Vietnam, China, and Sri Lanka.
- 1.6 The Committee considered all the submissions very carefully and holds genuine concerns for the welfare of these individuals. For this reason, the Committee decided to authorise the submissions for publication but redact the names and any contextual information that could lead to individuals being identified.
- 1.7 The Committee also took evidence from 23 organisations and individuals at ten public hearings held in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane over the course of the inquiry.²

Structure of the report

- 1.8 The Committee's report is structured around the inquiry's terms of reference. This introductory chapter provides an outline of the conduct of the inquiry.
- 1.9 Chapter 2 provides an overview of Australia's Human rights Dialogues to date, information on the human rights technical cooperation programs which operate under the framework of the human rights dialogues, as well as the roles and obligations of participating agencies.
- 1.10 Chapter 3 contains a discussion of whether the dialogues should incorporate greater parliamentary participation and oversight, particularly looking at the increased involvement of the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.
- 1.11 Chapter 4 focuses on the involvement of NGOs in the dialogues to date and Chapter 5 looks at how the dialogues and the human rights technical cooperation programs are reported on.
- 1.12 Chapter 6 examines how outcomes from the dialogues are currently monitored and evaluated, and considers options for ongoing reviews of the dialogues.
- 1.13 Chapter 7 examines the feasibility of establishing similar human rights dialogues with other countries and Chapter 8 explores options for complementary human rights mechanisms.

2 See appendices A, B and C.