

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Budget Estimates Hearings 2004-2005, 24 and 25 May 2004

Question: PM21

Outcome 1, Output 2.2: Women's Policy

Topic: Optional Protocol to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW)

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Senator Crossin asked: I am wondering whether you have an update on why the optional protocol has not been signed now. Does OSW take any ongoing interest in monitoring or inquiring into this?

Answer: Although the Australian Government's review of the UN treaty system was finalised in 2000, the findings and recommendations are continuing to be implemented as part of the overall reform of the UN treaty system.

In 2002, the UN Secretary-General requested that the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) consider a number of reform issues, including the need for more streamlined reporting procedures (an issue which Australia has consistently raised at the UN). Australia is working cooperatively with the OHCHR, the UN and other countries to progress this reform, and ultimately improve the functioning and effectiveness of the treaty committee system.

OSW is a member of the IDC on Treaty Body Reform and is kept fully informed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Attorney-General's Department on the status of the UN reform process.

Despite some reform measures being adopted by the UN, a number of key concerns that have been raised by Australia remain unaddressed and therefore the government is unwilling to sign the Optional Protocol to CEDAW at this stage.