

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Question No. 10

Senator Barnett asked the following question at the hearing on 23 February 2009:

Is there a composite assessment of Australia's overarching human rights record and an assessment on different aspects of human rights when compared to other comparable nations' records? If so, provide details of these assessments.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

Comparative assessment on different aspects of human rights

There exists no UN-sanctioned assessment of Australia's overarching human rights record against other comparable nations' records nor is there a quantitative global human rights index available at present.

However, some members of civil society (mostly NGOs and academics) have conducted their own comparative assessments, mostly in the area of civil and political rights and by way of assistance some links to those assessments are provided below:

- **World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report 2007***

The *Global Gender Gap Report* captures the magnitude of the gap between women and men in four critical areas: economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and survival.

The full report and rankings are available at:

<http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Gender%20Gap/index.htm>

Australia's country profile is available at:

http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/ggg07_australia.pdf

- **Freedom House's *Freedom in the World Report 2008***

Freedom in the World is a comparative assessment of global political rights and civil liberties.

The full report (including methodology) is available at:

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&country=7345&year=2008>

Australia's draft country report is available at:

http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana_page=342&year=2008

The 2009 report, including individual country reports, will be available in late autumn 2009.

- **Freedom House's *Global Press Freedom 2008***

The full table is available at:

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fop08/FOTP2008Tables.pdf>

Draft country reports are available at:

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fop08/CountryReportsFOTP2008.pdf>

- **Political Terror Scale**

Gibney, M., Cornett, L., & Wood, R., *Political Terror Scale 1976-2006*, available at:

<http://www.politicalterrorsscale.org/>

The Political Terror Scale (PTS) draws upon the yearly country reports of Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices to measure levels of political violence and terror that a country experiences in a particular year based on a 5-level “terror scale” originally developed by Freedom House.

The PTS scale is available at: <http://www.politicalterrorsscale.org/ptsdata.php>

- **CIRI Dataset**

Cingranelli, Dr. D. L. , Richards, Dr. D. L., *Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset (2009)*, available at: <http://www.humanrightsdata.org>

The Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset contains standards-based quantitative information on government respect for 15 internationally recognized human rights for 195 countries, annually from 1981-2007. The data set contains measures of government human rights practices, not human rights policies or overall human rights conditions (which may be affected by non-state actors).

For a brief explanation of how the rights and index are defined, see:

http://ciri.binghamton.edu/documentation/ciri_variables_short_descriptions.pdf

Composite assessment of Australia’s overarching human rights record

The United States’ State Department 2008 Human Rights Report provides an assessment of Australia’s overarching human rights record and identifies violence against women and children and Indigenous discrimination as problems which need to be addressed. It is available at:

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eap/119033.htm>

There are also various UN-sanctioned comments on Australia’s record in respect of individual aspects of human rights. Notable ones include:

- A joint letter from the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, dated 10 October 2007, criticising the Australian government on the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation.

This letter and the government’s response are summarised in the Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Doudou Diène (available at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/7session/A.HRC.7.19.Add.1.pdf> at pages 3 to 8).

See also pages 19 to 23 of the Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Yakin Ertürk (available at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/7session/A.HRC.7.6.Add.1.pdf>).

(Also of note: Barbara Shaw, Trainee with FAIRA (Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action), spoke about the Northern Territory Emergency Response at the 7th UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April 2008. The speech is available at: <http://sydney.indymedia.org.au/story/barbara-shaw-speaks-out-united-nations-re-northern-territory-intervention>.)

- Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, Miloon Kothari – Mission to Australia (31 July to 15 August 2006) (available at: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/3355934.html>).