

Calling for an Australian Bill of Rights

By Helen Reynolds, Executive Officer of the New Matilda's Human Rights Act Campaign.

In recent years, laws have been passed which significantly undermine our legal system. Australians can no longer expect the right to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence or freedom from detention without being charged.

We have mandatory detention for asylum seekers, anti-terrorist laws incorporating preventative detention, control orders and sedition laws, and more recently, highly invasive phone-tapping and email interception laws.

The New Matilda Human Rights Act for Australia campaign reflected growing concern at these developments and was launched in October 2005 around a draft Human Rights Act prepared by leading human rights and legal experts.

The draft Bill was refined following widespread community consultation and is being relaunched with the commencement of the lobbying phase of the campaign now focussed on generating support in the community and amongst parliamentarians.

The Northern Territory relaunch, held in Darwin on July 21, featured Senator Trish Crossin, Sharon Payne (CEO of NAAJA), Susan Ryan AO (Chair of the Campaign), Colin MacDonald QC, Tony Fitzgerald (NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner) and Charlie King (from *ABC Radio*).

The aim is to have the Bill introduced in parliament before the end of 2006, as a Private Members Bill sponsored by representatives from all parties, in both houses.

For more information visit www.newmatilda.com/humanrightsact

A Human Rights Act for Australia: the people's campaign

By Susan Ryan AO, Chair of the New Matilda Human Rights Act Committee, speech notes for the Darwin launch Friday 21 July 2006.

It is very important to our campaign to get the views, and, we hope, the support of Darwin people. I am delighted that we have so many community leaders here tonight prepared to speak in support of our



campaign and I look forward to introducing them to you.

We are here to invite you all to become part of new Matilda's community campaign for a Human Rights Act for Australia.

OUR CAMPAIGN; WHY AND HOW.

In Australia, citizens, refugees and temporary visitors used to believe something very important: that we were living in a modern democracy and as a result, our basic human rights were guaranteed.

Was this belief correct? Sadly, no.

For most of us, mainstream, reasonably well off members of white Australia, it was true that we had no cause to worry about our basic rights.

But, for more and more members of our society outside of the mainstream, for Aboriginal Australians, increasingly for migrants and refugees from the Middle East, and for the mentally ill, this was not true. They did have something to worry about, and this situation has gotten worse.

We now know that the human rights of all Australians can be undermined, and we now realise that we need a national law to protect those rights.

Our campaign is aimed at getting our national parliament to pass a law that will protect our traditional political rights.

WHAT ARE THESE RIGHTS?

You will recognise them. They are rights we all used to take for granted:

- * the right to vote,
- * freedom of movement,
- * the right to a fair trial,
- * equality before the law,
- * the right not to be detained without charge,
- * freedom of religion,
- * freedom the practice one's culture.

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