



3 May 2021

The Hon Alex Hawke MP
Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

RE: Social Cohesion Statement

Thank you for inviting the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council to participate in a roundtable discussion on the proposed Social Cohesion Statement (the Statement).

It is noted that the Statement is underpinned by Australian Values defined by the Australia Government which are based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity and are central to our community remaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful place to live. Australian Values include:

- respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual
- freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of association
- commitment to the rule of law
- parliamentary democracy
- equality of opportunity for all people
- a 'fair go', and
- recognising the English language as the national language.

The feedback is offered with reference to this context.

The Society comprises 50,000 volunteers and 6,000 staff. Assistance is provided to all in need, not just Australian citizens. The Society's assistance takes all forms and is aimed at alleviating suffering or deprivation and promoting human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions. In the last 12 months, the Society has provided emergency relief, accommodation and food to many people on temporary visas, including people seeking asylum and refugees.

This approach aligns with the principles of the dignity of the human person and the common good. We also recognise the strength of local approaches and solutions and believe individuals and communities achieve their full potential through empowerment.

True social cohesion requires all community members taking responsibility for it, not just new Australian citizens. It requires more than just proficiency in English but also community and service support networks that are culturally appropriate, accessible and welcoming.

True social cohesion also requires acknowledgement and recognition of our First Nations peoples.

Given that the Statement is underpinned by the rule of law, it is remiss not to acknowledge or refer to Australia's international obligations.

We consider that reference should be made to human rights given that Australia is a party to seven core international human rights treaties.¹

We consider that the nature of the obligations contained in seven other protocols to which Australia is a party should also be reflected.²

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. oConnor', followed by a long horizontal line.

Toby oConnor
Chief Executive Officer

¹ Australia is a party to the seven core international human rights treaties:

1. the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights- external site (ICCPR)
2. the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights- external site (ICESCR)
3. the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination- external site (CERD)
4. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women- external site (CEDAW)
5. the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment- external site (CAT)
6. the Convention on the Rights of the Child- external site (CRC)
7. the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities- external site (CRPD).

Attorney-Genera's Department. International Human Rights System. Accessed at: [https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/international-human-rights-system#:~:text=Australia%20is%20a%20party%20to,Civil%20and%20Political%20Rights%20\(ICCPR\)](https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/international-human-rights-system#:~:text=Australia%20is%20a%20party%20to,Civil%20and%20Political%20Rights%20(ICCPR))

² Australia is also a party to:

1. the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights- external site establishing an individual communication mechanism
2. the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Aiming at the Abolition of the Death Penalty- external site
3. the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict- external site
4. the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography- external site
5. the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women- external site establishing an individual communication mechanism
6. the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities- external site establishing an individual communication mechanism
7. the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.