

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad
Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit

Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO

Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO and UNICEF

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31 January 2008

Hon Robert McClelland MP
Attorney General
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr McClelland

We are writing to congratulate you on your appointment as our new Attorney General. We would like to provide you with some information about our organisation and our hopes for a more just and law-abiding Australia.

The Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is an international non-government organisation in consultative status with United Nations ECOSOC and UNESCO. WILPF also has special consultative relations with the FAO, ILO and UNICEF. We have been in existence since 1915 and our Australian Section works with many related NGOs to put forward our views on peace, social justice, environmental issues and issues facing women.

WILPF has observed that during the eleven years of the Howard Government, Australia has increasingly moved away from being recognised as a 'good international citizen' to being viewed as a nation whose leaders are prepared to support those who act outside the accepted norms of international law.

Indicators of concern include:

- Australia's involvement in the invasion of Iraq as a partner in the *Coalition of the Willing* which acted unilaterally and without a mandate from the UN Security Council.

- Failure to speak out against the United States' use of torture against inmates in Guantanamo Bay and also in the secret network of prisons in Europe and Africa.
- Failure to speak out against the United States' use of extraordinary rendition.
- Development of the *Pacific Solution* to keep people seeking asylum away from Australia where they could receive legal and other support from our communities.
- Excising islands from the Australian mainland to prevent asylum seekers claiming asylum when they reached these outlying islands.
- Keeping asylum seekers in mandatory detention in isolated locations. It is noted that most were found to be *bona fide* refugees after unacceptably long periods of mandatory detention.
- Developing a raft of iniquitous Anti-Terrorism Bills which were stealthily introduced into Federal Parliament in small chunks in order to avoid thorough scrutiny but all designed to take away precious civil liberties.
- Failure to ensure that David Hicks received a fair and timely trial and failing to bring him home.

WILPF is hopeful that with the change to a Labor Government many of these harsh and unwarranted legal difficulties will be rectified.

We look forward to a review of all the Anti-Terrorism legislation and a return of our lost civil liberties.

We urge you to use your good offices to bring Australia back into the high regard it was once held internationally by genuinely supporting the United Nations, international conventions and treaties, thus promoting a more peaceful and just global community.

Australia is now notable as the only western country not to have a national Bill of Rights to stand as a benchmark on how Australian citizens can expect to be treated and to be provided protection through domestic law. We seek your support for a national Bill of Rights similar to the Bills already legislated in the ACT and Victoria and those being considered in Queensland, NSW and Western Australia.

We look forward to progress on these important issues over the coming year.

Once again, our best wishes for your appointment as Attorney General.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell

Joint National Coordinators