



Submission for the Australian Human Rights Commission's Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Parliament of Australia

There is no acceptable level of pain. There is no acceptable level of suffering.

But the elected Members and Senators of the Australian Parliament keep choosing to accept the pain and suffering of children, young people and adults in our country and in our care.

Privileged people with power choosing suffering they will never face. There are good people in Parliament, but they're not the ones running it, and for that our children suffer.

The vision we once had

69 years ago the Commonwealth of Australia signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, after two world wars caused the death of over a hundred million human beings at the hands or orders of other human beings.

45 years ago Australian Prime Minister William McMahon launched the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, later expanded by the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, leading to a greater understanding of poverty and policies that drove vast improvement and expansion of social security protection, public housing, education and health care.¹

30 years ago Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke made the promise that "By 1990, no Australian child will live in poverty" - his Government's actions helped cut child poverty rates by 30%² and saw Australia become signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990.

But after decades of leadership, the human rights of children in Australia are still not protected in practice or in law today.

Failing to protect Child Rights today

In Australia today more than a million young people born since 1990 live in poverty, including 731,000 kids under the age of 15, but Governments keep forcing safety nets below the poverty line and denying people social protection³, in violation of the human right to an adequate standard of living, social security and freedom from poverty (Cluster 7: Article 26 and Article 27).

Today we have over 43,000 young people living homeless⁴ but we don't even have a *plan* to ensure everybody's home, in violation of the human right to safe housing (Cluster 7: Article 27).

Today we have more than 1 in 5 children living in a food insecure household⁵, in violation of the human right to adequate nutritious foods (Cluster 7: Article 24 and Article 27).

Today we have hundreds of young people who sought our refuge and have been imprisoned for it, in detention centres, camps and island prisons⁶, in violation of the human right to safe refuge from a State (Cluster 9: Article 22).

These numbers represent immense human suffering and disregard for the rights of the child.

¹ Australian Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1972

² Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS): Briefing: A Future For All Children 2017

³ ACOSS: Poverty Report 2016

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census 2016: Estimating homelessness (2049.0)

⁵ Foodbank: Rumbling Tummies Report 2018

⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission: The Forgotten Children, National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014

The biggest threat to the health, wellbeing and future of young people in Australia is one that hangs over almost everyone's head from birth - the threat of poverty and the denial of basic human necessities, an artificially finite zero-sum world where housing is prioritised as an investment instead of a human right and 2.8 million job people need work⁷⁸⁹ but there's less than 221,000 job vacancies.¹⁰

Poverty crushes the life out of you. No kid should have to worry about money. No kid should have to worry about dinner. No kid should have to worry having a safe place to sleep.

Every child needs a safe home and enough money to live. Without that they cannot be free.

We need to stop acting like it's ok to deny children their human rights.

It's time to raise the rate of all income support above the poverty line.

It's time for a national emergency response to homelessness to ensure a safe roof over everyone's head.

It's time to form a national plan for eradicating homelessness and poverty.

It's time to protect human rights in Australian law.

It's time for the Parliament of Australia to establish a Statutory Commission of Inquiry into the Protection of Human Rights.

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⁷ Australian Council of Trade Unions: Jobs You Can Count On 2018

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): Labour Force, Australia (6202.0) February 2018

⁹ ABS: Participation, Job Search and Mobility, Australia (6226.0) February 2017

¹⁰ ABS: Job Vacancies, Australia (6354.0) February 2018

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