

Chapter 11

International Activities

While the role and functions of HREOC as set out in legislation are primarily directed towards human rights issues within Australia, HREOC undertakes an international education and training role, with a specific focus on agencies in the Asia Pacific region.

In 2007-08, as in past years, most of this has taken the form of technical cooperation programs with other countries. These programs, which are based around sharing knowledge and expertise, are generally delivered through the framework of the Australian Government's development cooperation program administered by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). This international technical cooperation work is externally funded (not from HREOC's core budget, which is devoted to fulfilling its domestic mandate).

These programs, along with HREOC's participation in other international fora, such as the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, also provide a valuable way to keep abreast of international developments in human rights and models of best practice for national human rights institutions.

HREOC's international role has evolved from the way that it has pursued its domestic responsibilities. It also reflects the organisation's belief that helping to strengthen human rights protection in other countries has flow-on benefits for everyone, including Australia. The international work also provides staff development and gives wider international perspectives which enhance HREOC's domestic work.

In undertaking these activities, HREOC engages with a variety of institutions and professionals relevant to the protection and promotion of human rights; for example, government agencies and civil society groups in other countries, that are involved in the protection and promotion of human rights and interested in how the Australian experience could be relevant to their country. The activities seek to strengthen the capacity of those institutions to protect human rights through the increased 'professionalism' of agencies involved in enforcing or implementing laws and the rule of law.

Many of HREOC's international training activities involve a staged process of implementation, from initial scoping to design through to full implementation. This reflects the strong emphasis HREOC gives to detailed planning to ensure that the Australian input accords with the needs and priorities of overseas partner agencies.

It also reflects the fact that success in this area requires a gradualist approach, with substantive progress often being preceded by a lengthy process of establishing relationships and building confidence in the program. Concerted efforts are also made to ensure that partner agencies feel a sense of ownership of the program, which is essential to its success and long-term sustainability.

Most of the international training activities undertaken by HREOC centre on practical issues that affect the lives of individuals, such as domestic violence, police conduct, prison management, investigation techniques, access to legal aid and so on. Notwithstanding this practical focus, efforts are made to ensure that the activities are firmly grounded in human rights principles set out in international law.

11.1 CHINA-AUSTRALIA HUMAN RIGHTS TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAM

HREOC's most substantial international program involvement is with the *China-Australia Human Rights Technical Cooperation Program* (HRTC), which is an integral part of Australia's annual inter-governmental Dialogue on Human Rights with China. HREOC participates in the annual meetings of the dialogue.

The HRTC program encompasses three principal themes: protection of the rights of women and children; protection of ethnic minority rights; and reform of the legal system. The program aims to provide an important information base of human rights principles, ideas and strategies which can be drawn upon in the development of Chinese policies and practices. The program includes activities conducted in both China and Australia. Each activity in the program is implemented as a cooperative venture between HREOC and particular Chinese organisations. Some selected examples of activities implemented in the 2007-08 HRTC Program are given below.

- In July 2007, a Domestic Violence Workshop was held in Shenyang, Liaoning Province. The workshop was conducted in cooperation with the All China Women's Federation but also involved other relevant Chinese agencies, such as the public security bureaus. The main focus of the workshop was on developing coordinated inter-agency responses to supporting victims of domestic violence.
- In October 2007, a Model United Nations was held in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, in cooperation with the United Nations Association of China. This activity simulated the proceedings of the United Nations Human Rights Council in the debate and adoption of resolutions on selected human rights issues.
- In November 2007, a delegation from the National Population and Family Planning Commission visited New South Wales and South Australia to study measures for protecting and promoting human rights in the delivery of family planning and reproductive health services.
- In November 2007, a delegation from the Penitentiary Administration Department of the Ministry of Public Security visited Western Australia. During their visit they examined Australian laws and policies for protecting and promoting the rights of detainees.
- In November 2007, a Women's Labour Rights Workshop was held in Fuzhou, Fujian Province. The workshop was held in cooperation with the All China Women's Federation, and examined mechanisms for protecting the rights of female workers and promoting a discrimination free workplace for women.
- In January 2008, a Training Workshop for Migrant Workers' Lawyers was held in Beijing, in cooperation with the Beijing Legal Aid Organisation for Rural Migrants. Participants discussed methodologies for providing effective legal aid services to rural migrants.

- In February 2008, a delegation from the Supreme People's Court visited New South Wales to examine measures for protecting and promoting the rights of victims of crime.
- In February 2008, an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrived in Australia to undertake postgraduate studies in human rights at the University of Melbourne.
- In April 2008, a delegation from the Supreme People's Procuratorate visited New South Wales to study laws and policies for combating corruption and encouraging ethical conduct in the public sector.
- In April 2008, a Seminar on Judicial Mediation was held in Kunming, Yunnan Province. The seminar was conducted with the National Judges' College of China, and was aimed at supporting reforms to develop specialist mediation units within Chinese courts.
- In April 2008, a Seminar on Government Support for Non-Profit Organisations was held in Beijing. The seminar, which was conducted with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, discussed ways governments can encourage an active role for civil society organisations.
- In May 2008, a delegation from the Beijing Legal Aid Organisation for Rural Migrants visited Australia. During their visit they met a range of Australian organisations working in the provision of legal services for disadvantaged members of the community.
- In May 2008, a Seminar on Victims of Crime was held in Qingdao, Shandong Province. The seminar was conducted in cooperation with the Supreme People's Court. Participants discussed victims' compensation schemes and other support services for victims of crime.
- In May 2008, an Anti-Corruption Seminar was held in Tianjin Municipality, in cooperation with the Supreme People's Procuratorate. The seminar examined measures applied in both China and Australia to combat corruption, focusing particularly on the link between corruption and human rights.

11.2 VIETNAM-AUSTRALIA HUMAN RIGHTS TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAM

HREOC also participates in the Vietnam-Australia Dialogue on International Organisations and Legal Issues, including Human Rights.

A program of human rights technical cooperation with Vietnam was established as part of the dialogue and commenced in late 2006. The HRTC program with Vietnam focuses on four areas: access to justice; dissemination of information about legal rights and obligations; the rights of women; and raising awareness of international human rights treaty obligations. HRTC activities implemented in 2007-08 included the following:

- In July 2007, a Seminar on Access to Justice was held in Ho Chi Minh City, in cooperation with the Supreme People's Court. The seminar was attended by judges and staff from district courts in the southern provinces of Vietnam. Participants examined measures for enhancing access to justice and protection of human rights in the judicial system.

- In July 2007, a Seminar on Access to Justice was held in Hanoi. This activity was similar to the abovementioned seminar in Ho Chi Min City, but with participants from the northern provinces.
- In August 2007, a Seminar on Vietnam and International Human Rights Treaties was held in Ho Chi Minh City, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The seminar aimed to assist officials become familiar with Vietnam's obligations under international human rights treaties, and domestic laws and policies to give effect to those treaties.
- In August 2007, a series of four women's rights training sessions were held in the provinces of Hung Yen and Nam Dinh. The training was conducted in cooperation with the Vietnam Women's Union and attended by staff from district and commune level women's unions.
- In August 2007, a Seminar on Dissemination of Legal Information was held in Ho Chi Minh City, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. The seminar provided capacity building for government officials in their work of informing citizens about their rights under Vietnamese law.
- In December 2007, the Vietnam Women's Union completed a series of 48 'Women's Rights Legal Talk Shows', which were presented in twelve target communes in Hung Yen and Nam Dinh Provinces. The presentations were attended by approximately 3 000 women.
- In January 2008, the Vietnam Women's Union completed a series of Women's Rights Legal Consultations, The consultations were held in twelve target communes in Hung Yen and Nam Dinh Provinces.
- In February 2008, the Vietnam Women's Union completed publication of a series of women's rights newsletters and legal bulletins. The materials were published in three editions over a period of six months, and distributed to approximately 12 000 households in Hung Yen and Nam Dinh Provinces.
- In June 2008, the Ministry of Justice completed the publication of 4 000 copies of a 'legal booklet', to be used as a resource by government officials in their work of informing citizens about their legal rights. The activity also involved translation of the booklet into three languages: H'Mong, Bahna and Kho'me.

The first phase of the HRTC Program was completed in June 2008. In January 2008, HREOC participated in a Program Design Mission to Vietnam, for consultations with Vietnamese authorities that produced the design of the second phase of the technical cooperation program. Pending formal approval, implementation of the program is expected to commence later in 2008.

11.3 ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) was established in 1996 and its secretariat was hosted by HREOC until the APF became a separate and incorporated entity in 2002.

The Australian Government, through the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and AusAID has provided financial support for the APF since its establishment. The APF also receives contributions from its member institutions and grants from governments, the United Nations, foundations and other non-government organisations.

The APF is the leading regional human rights organisation in the Asia Pacific. It is a member-based organisation that supports the establishment and strengthening of independent human rights institutions in the region. The APF provides practical support to its members to assist them in their role of promoting, monitoring and protecting human rights. It also provides specialist advice to governments and civil society groups. The APF currently has seventeen member institutions drawn from all parts of the Asia Pacific.

During the reporting period, HREOC hosted the APF's Twelfth Annual Meeting in Sydney from 24-27 September 2007. HREOC is the Chair of the APF until its next annual meeting which will be hosted by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia in July 2008.



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HREOC worked with the APF to provide training to the Pacific Disability Forum to help build the capacity of national disability organisations in the Pacific. The training was provided in Samoa

As Chairperson, the President of HREOC, the Hon. John von Doussa, undertook several speaking roles on behalf of the APF, including at the 20th session of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions held in Geneva from 14-18 April 2008. In addition Mr von Doussa spoke at the International Conference on Terrorism, Human Security and Development in Hong Kong on 17 October 2007.

HREOC provides a wide range of support to other national human rights institutions under the umbrella of the APF. In November 2007 HREOC was commissioned by the APF to provide two training workshops on human rights investigations to the staff of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea. These workshops were held in Seoul, Korea from 5-7 October and 31 October to 2 November 2007.

HREOC participated in a workshop on the review of the role and functions of the APF's Advisory Council of Jurists that was hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of India and held in Delhi, India from 26-28 February 2008.

HREOC has also been working with the APF to provide training to the Pacific Disability Forum on thematic areas like women with disabilities, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the Pacific Plan and the Biwako Millennium Framework, to help build the capacity of national disability organisations in the Pacific. This training was held in Apia, Samoa from 23-25 April 2008.

HREOC continues to strongly support the APF and has a Memorandum of Understanding with its secretariat which provides for accommodation and corporate services support.

11.4 INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

In addition to formal programs of bilateral technical cooperation, HREOC frequently receives international visitors and participates in meetings with representatives of organisations concerned with human rights. A summary of these meetings is given below.

- In July 2007, HREOC met with a delegation of officers working in immigration and border services from Australia, Canada, the UK and USA, as part of an exchange program sponsored by DIAC.
- In August 2007, HREOC hosted a delegation of Muslim community leaders from Singapore, including representatives of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore.
- In October 2007, HREOC hosted a visit by a delegation led by the Chief Commissioner of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, Ms Daramjav Solongo.
- In October 2007, HREOC hosted a delegation from the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights and other relevant agencies as part of the AusAID human rights training program.
- In October 2007, a delegation from the ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs of Bangladesh visited HREOC.
- In December 2007, HREOC hosted a delegation from the Malaysian Human Rights Commission, SUHAKAM.
- In January 2008, HREOC met with Justice Zak Yacoob of the South African Constitutional Court.

- In March 2008, HREOC hosted a further delegation from the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights and other relevant agencies, also under the AusAID human right training program.
- In March 2008, HREOC hosted eight Chinese lawyers who were in Australia as part of the Attorney-General's *Australia-China Legal Profession Development Program*.
- In April 2008, HREOC hosted a visit by Ms Angela Kerins, Chairperson of the Irish Equality Authority.
- In April 2008, HREOC met with Professor Nguyen Thi Kim Tien, Vice Minister of Health of Vietnam.
- In April 2008, HREOC hosted a visit by Ms Gay McDougall, the UN Independent Expert on Minority Rights and the Chairperson of the Coordinating Committee of UN Human Rights Special Procedures.
- In June 2008, HREOC hosted a delegation of provincial and local government officials from Mindanao, Philippines.



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The Sex Discrimination Commissioner and the President, pictured with a delegation from the ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs of Bangladesh

11.5 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

International conferences and meetings HREOC participated in during 2007-08 included:

- Workshop on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, November 2007.
- Meeting of the Expanded Bureau of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, Geneva, Switzerland, December 2007.
- 52nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, New York, United States, February 2008.
- Workshop on the review of the role and functions of the Asia Pacific Forum Advisory Council of Jurists, Delhi, India, February 2008.
- Regional Seminar, Strategies for the Future: Protecting Rights in the Pacific, Apia, Samoa, April 2008.
- National Women with Disabilities Forum, Apia, Samoa, April 2008.
- Twentieth Session of the Annual Meeting of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, Geneva, Switzerland, April 2008.
- Beijing Forum on Human Rights, Beijing, China, April 2008.