

MEDIA RELEASE



MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Hon Julie Bishop MP

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Senator the Hon George Brandis QC

15 December 2017

RATIFICATION OF OPCAT CAPS YEAR OF SIGNIFICANT HUMAN RIGHTS ACHIEVEMENTS FOR TURNBULL GOVERNMENT

The Turnbull Government today announces another significant victory for human rights in Australia, ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

Ratifying OPCAT fulfils a voluntary pledge made by Australia to the United Nations during our Human Rights Council campaign. It will improve oversight of places of detention, including immigration detention facilities, prisons, juvenile detention centres, and various psychiatric facilities.

This historic ratification of OPCAT, with formal documents to be lodged at the United Nations in New York next week, caps a year of historic human rights achievements by the Turnbull Government. These have included:

- The delivery of marriage equality;
- Australia's election, for the first time, to the United Nations Human Rights Council;
- The conclusion of two important Royal Commissions; and
- The reform of the Human Rights Commission Act to ensure swifter, fairer handling of complaints with respect for natural justice.

The Government is committed to ensuring implementation is practical and effective. Ratification is not the end, but the beginning of an ongoing discussion about oversight and monitoring.

Ratifying OPCAT demonstrates Australia's unwavering commitment to international scrutiny and accountability, as Australia prepares to take its seat on the Human Rights Council for the 2018–20 term.

The Government is committed to working with states and territories, which are responsible for managing many places of detention across Australia. It is the responsibility of all Australian governments to ensure our obligations under OPCAT are fulfilled.

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman will take a lead role in facilitating and coordinating Australia's domestic oversight arrangements.

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It has been eight years since Australia signed OPCAT. While Labor did nothing to progress ratification, the Coalition Government has acted and shown commitment to protecting and promoting human rights.

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