

Strong and effective racial vilification laws needed to stop the spread of racial hatred

The Australian Government must maintain strong and effective laws against racial hatred, Aboriginal, ethnic and human rights organisations said today in a joint letter that responds to the inquiry into the racial vilification protections in the Racial Discrimination Act.

The release of the letter coincides with a meeting in Melbourne today between the UN expert on racism, Mutuma Ruteere, and Aboriginal, ethnic and human rights organisations.

Joe Caputo, Chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia said, "While Australia is a proudly multicultural nation, sadly the evidence shows that more and more people are experiencing discrimination."

"The Government should be doing everything it can to fight racism and hate speech in our community. At this time more than ever, it must send a strong message that the protection of vulnerable minority groups from racial vilification is a priority," Mr Caputo added.

The letter emphasises the importance of the racial vilification laws in the Racial Discrimination Act in preventing the serious harm caused by racism.

Wayne Muir, Co-Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, said, "For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia, racism is an everyday experience, with serious impacts on physical and mental health."

"The current racial vilification laws help us build an Australia that we can be proud of – one that is free from racism, proud of diversity and celebrates the things that make us different. Weakening the law will only take us backwards," Mr Muir added.

Hugh de Kretser, Executive Director of the Human Rights Law Centre, said, "We need strong and effective racial vilification laws to stop the spread of racial hatred and discrimination in the community. Weakening these laws would give a green light to bigotry."

Mr de Kretser added, "Our current Federal racial vilification laws have been interpreted sensibly by the courts. They contain a broad defence that strikes the right balance between freedom of speech and freedom from vilification. We must not weaken them."

The open letter also supports the Australian Human Rights Commission's efficient mediation process for resolving complaints.

"The Commission provides a low-cost, informal way to resolve discrimination and vilification complaints. The majority of complaints that go to mediation are resolved. Only a handful go to court each year," said Mr de Kretser.

The letter is supported by leading organisations and peak bodies including the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT, Amnesty International, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, Get Up!, Human Rights Law Centre, Lowitja Institute, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Refugee Council of Australia, Oxfam Australia and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

A copy of the open letter can be read [here](#).

For further comments or queries please contact:

Hugh de Kretser, Human Rights Law Centre: 0403 965 340

Wayne Muir, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services: 0467 505 642

Joe Caputo, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia: 0419 173 122

