



Human Rights and the Next Generation - Young people are leaders

Context and challenges

Young people in Australia today face an uncertain future; the federal government continues to approve fossil fuel projects, even as people across the country face flooding and fires fueled by climate change, the cost of living crisis has made housing and healthcare increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible, and anti-protest laws mean people may face tens of thousands in fines and even prison sentences for trying to create change.

These intersecting human rights issues, all of which are deeply intertwined with First Nations justice, particularly impact marginalised young people; trans young people are at increased risk of homelessness, and face discrimination in health services, and difficulties accessing gender affirming care.

Young people are the next generation of human rights defenders, and they need a tool to right these wrongs, so they can create a world where they, and everyone in Australia, enjoy all their human rights. A Human Rights Act will help young people create this world.

The urgency

In a global environment where human rights frameworks are being undermined and a domestic context that is seeing a shift towards repressive policy towards some of the most vulnerable communities it is critical that we instill in the next generation an understanding of and passion for defending human rights.

Young people are the future, and the next generation of rights defenders, but they face unprecedented challenges. A Human Rights Act will address the intersecting issues impacting young people and give them a tool to realise their rights. Our campaign for an Act will prioritise their leadership and create a movement who can create a fairer future. A future where trans young people can access affordable gender-affirming care, where everyone has a place to call home, and people can challenge the approval of coal mines for violating their human right to a healthy environment.

A Human Rights Act will:

- Improve laws, policies, and services for young people, as the federal government (Parliament, Departments and Agencies, and service providers) will be required to consult with young people when making decisions that impact them,
- The federal government will also be required to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people with disabilities, which will improve laws, policies, and services for these communities.
- Prevent human rights abuses by requiring the federal government to consider human rights and mitigate human rights abuses when drafting laws, developing policies, and delivering services.
- Right wrongs by giving young people, and everyone in Australia, a tool to take action when their human rights are violated, People will be able to take action by making a complaint or by launching a case in court, to remedy those violations.



Campaign objectives

AIA has been working to ensure a human rights act for Australia and after decades of inaction in May 2024 we saw important progress in this area as a direct result of our movements campaigning. The Labor-led Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights recommended for the government to legislate a Human Rights Act. As such we need to ensure that the government agrees to the inquiry recommendation and commits to legislating a Human Rights Act. Now is not the time to take pressure off the call for an Act but a time to strengthen our approach.

We are campaigning to achieve:

- Human Rights Act for Australia protected in law
- A new generation of human rights defenders committed to upholding the need to our rights to be protected in law

To get there we are working to :

- Ensure a human rights act is legislated by advocating for the government to accept the Labor-led Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights recommendation to legislate a Human Rights Act.
- Deepen our collaboration with young people to co-design and lead the campaign, enabling and empowering the active participation of young people as leaders of a movement of active agents of change who campaign for human rights and a fairer future. We will create space for young people to inform the campaign and build structures for genuine participation. We will create an environment in which they actively contribute to human rights impact, and which allows young people to build communities and connections to tackle the uncertain future together, and to be at the forefront of Amnesty's movement. This sustainable movement of young people will be able to fight for human rights, and to campaign for (and create) a rights respecting society, now and into the future.

Why Amnesty?

Australia is the only liberal democracy in the world without a federal Human Rights Act.

Anti-discrimination laws protect people's right to live free from discrimination. But if you're denied rights such as healthcare or education, there's no framework to challenge the system. As the leading Human Rights organization in Australia, it is essential that we stay the course and continue to build on the success of the work of the last five years. The long-term success of all our campaigns ultimately depends on having overarching human rights protection enshrined in law.

We know that the vast majority (75%) of Australians support the introduction of an HRA when told Australia doesn't currently have one, so it is incumbent upon us to continue to reach new audiences and engage with young people to ensure that we continue momentum towards public support and action.

Amnesty adds specific value to the campaign for a Human Rights Act in Australia alongside our partners because we take a people powered approach to our campaigning, which means we can invest in critical youth engagement to build and empower the next generation of human rights advocates and defenders.



What We've Learned

Campaigning directly on a Human Rights Act has been difficult to build momentum around and attract new people to act as it lacks urgency. This campaign also centers around a change that is legal in nature which can be seen as a dry topic and confusing, especially to those who believe our rights are already protected in Australia.

As such we need to change tack to engage young people on the issues that they care about most and build understanding with them around why a human rights Act is critical as part of any change that needs to be made on those issues.

The following themes have been identified as potential focus areas:

Climate

- Right to a healthy environment
- The federal government continues to approve fossil fuel projects / net zero target
- Pacifica people

Women

- Gender-based violence (by men, intimate partners)
- Difficulties accessing reproductive healthcare

LGBTQIA+

- Conversion practices
- And-trans narratives
- Accessing gender-affirming healthcare

Housing

- Lack of social housing
- Lack of protections for renters

Right to Protest

- Laws that restrict people's rights
- Anti-protest narratives
- Digital rights / right to privacy
- Health (mental health / disability)