

Stellar lineup heads 2009 conference



Keynote speaker, Federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland

An outstanding line-up of speakers will present their perspective on a range of issues facing human rights at this year's Castan Centre Annual Conference, entitled "The Changing Human Rights Landscape". The conference, to be held on 17 July 2009 at the State Library of Victoria, will feature the Hon. Robert McClelland, Australia's Attorney-General, as its keynote speaker.

In light of the Rudd Government's current

National Human Rights Consultation, Mr McClelland will address the promotion and protection of human rights in this country. Considering the vigorous debate that the consultation has already unleashed, Mr McClelland's speech will be closely followed in the human rights world.

The debate on a national bill of rights follows the creation of the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act* in 2006. The Charter clearly sets out Victorians' rights, freedoms and responsibilities and ensures that government departments and all public bodies observe and respect these rights and freedoms in fulfilling their responsibilities. Mr Alistair Pound, a barrister who recently authored (with Kylie Evans) *An Annotated Guide to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*, will assess the success of this revolutionary legislation from a lawyer's perspective. The Hon. Justice Chris Maxwell, the President of the Court of Appeal in Victoria, will follow with a judge's perspective on the same issue.

The afternoon sessions of the conference will focus on international human rights issues and will be headlined by the Hon. Robert Hill, who retired from his role as

Australia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in April this year. Mr Hill will speak on Australia's record of international engagement in the area of human rights, focusing on the Howard and Rudd years. Professor Hilary Charlesworth, the Director of the Centre for International Governance and Justice at the Australian National University, will follow with her perspective on the same broad topic.

The UN Human Rights Council, a controversial body whose main purpose is to make recommendations to the General Assembly about situations in which human rights are violated, will be appraised by Professor Chris Sidoti, the former Australian Human Rights Commissioner and current spokesman for the Human Rights Council of Australia. He will look at the progress and problems which the Human Rights Council has encountered since its creation in 2006. Finally, Professor Sarah Joseph, the Director of the Castan Centre, will update participants with an overview of major international human rights cases decided in the past year.

For further details on the conference, please see the ad on the back page of this newsletter.

The National Human Rights Consultation needs your input

As the only Western democracy without a bill of rights, the news that Australia is considering implementing legislative protection of human rights has been welcomed by community groups around the country. Following from the recommendations of the 2020 Summit's "future of Australian governance" stream (which included Castan Centre Director Sarah Joseph), the Rudd Government has launched a National Human Rights Consultation, which is exploring how Australians feel human rights should be protected. The Consultation is being run by an independent committee chaired by Father Frank Brennan, with Mary Kostakidis, Mick Palmer, and Tammy Williams as members.

Three questions are being asked by the

committee: "which human rights should be protected", "are these rights currently sufficiently protected in Australia", and "how can Australia better promote and protect human rights". In answering these questions, the Committee is seeking direct input from the community by accepting written submissions and by conducting public community roundtables, which anyone can attend.

The Castan Centre is in the process of preparing a submission on these issues. Given the importance of the topic, the centre encourages all concerned individuals and organisations to make their own submissions to the inquiry.

A number of organisations have created educational documents and simple

feedback forms you can use in making your submission. The Human Rights Law Resource Centre (HRLRC) has created a suite of documents to help you understand what human rights are and how you can make your voice heard on the issues, all of which are available on their website: www.hrlrc.org.au/our-work/focus/national-consultation. HRLRC is also conducting a number of workshops on specific human rights topics. Amnesty International Australia has additional information about participating in the consultation as well as a pre-drafted simple on-line submission form you can send to the Consultation Committee, available from www.amnesty.org.au. Additionally, you can make your own online submission directly through the consultation's website, www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au.

Newsletter name winner going to conference

Congratulations to Eliza Bram who has won our "name the newsletter" competition. "Rapporteur" is a common name in human rights circles, and is often used to denote experts who investigate human rights issues. The European Parliament regularly appoints rapporteurs on a range of issues, and the UN and other international bodies have numerous "special rapporteurs" on issues as diverse as the rights to education and health, the rights of indigenous people, the use of torture and human trafficking. Eliza has won two tickets to the Castan Centre's annual conference.