

**10th Annual Meeting
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
24-26 August 2005**

Asia Pacific Regional Cooperation - Government Reports

Mrs Julia Feeney
First Secretary
Australian Mission to the United Nations

Statement by the Government of Australia

The Australian Government is once again very pleased to be participating as an observer in this the 10th annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

Whether through assisting the establishment of new national institutions or strengthening those that exist, the services provided by the Asia Pacific Forum – and the dedicated staff of its Secretariat – have contributed significantly to improving the promotion and protection of human rights in our neighbourhood. At the same time, we commend the Forum for the role it has played in upholding the standards established for national institutions by the Paris Principles.

The Australian Government remains firmly committed to supporting the Forum in these efforts. Again this year, Australia contributed 500 000 Australian dollars to the Forum as part of an ongoing triennial funding package. By contributing to a sound financial base, our aim is to enable the Forum to continue to focus on its central task - supporting member human rights institutions assist the people of the Region.

Key to ensuring the enduring impact of the Forum will be an expanded and diversified funding base for its activities. In this regard, the increasing number of donors – especially governments in the Asia Pacific – bodes well for the future and we call upon regional governments and other donors to continue to help create sustainability for the Forum.

A singular success of the Forum has been its ability to focus attention and energies on thematic human rights challenges. We look forward to hearing the outcomes of discussion on this year's theme – national institutions and the prevention of torture.

At the same time that we address immediate challenges, it is imperative that we enhance the foundations upon which human rights are built. The engagement of Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission with other national institutions in the Asia Pacific has bolstered regional human rights capacities. Through our development assistance, Australia remains committed to encouraging good governance throughout the Region as an important element of this foundation.

Governance is the largest sectoral element of Australia's development assistance program (estimated to be \$885m in 2005-06). This investment will continue to help

our neighbours improve economic and financial management, strengthen public sector institutions, strengthen democratic systems and entrench the rule of law.

Decisions at the inter-state level mean little if they are not implemented within states. And national institutions can be a bridge facilitating implementation. It is therefore important for them to have adequate standing before bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights. Australia remains committed to supporting national institutions at the international level and we will continue to work to ensure their active engagement with the Commission – or any possible successor institution. We look forward to continuing to work constructively with partners to achieve this end.

In closing, the Australian Government would like to thank Mongolia for hosting this year's annual meeting. The arrangements have been excellent and the hospitality exceptional.