



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

STATEMENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

*11TH Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
Suva, Fiji, 31 July-3 August 2006*

Honourable and distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

First, I would like to say that it is a pleasure to be in the beautiful island setting of Fiji for this 11th annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to our hosts, the Government of Fiji and the Fiji Human Rights Commission, for the efforts that have gone into this successful meeting and for the warm hospitality extended. The Asia Pacific Forum should also be congratulated for their work in the co-ordination of this event.

Australia has a longstanding and enduring commitment to human rights. We are strong supporters of the Asia Pacific Forum and activities that strengthen the implementation of human rights at the national level and good governance.

We commend the Forum for helping to establish new institutions and for strengthening those that currently exist. National human rights institutions act as a bridge between international and national human rights protection mechanisms.

The Australian Government remains committed to supporting national institutions at the international level. We will continue to promote national institutions in the newly established Human Rights Council. In our recent statement to the Council, we emphasised the importance of the Council engaging with national institutions and civil society.

The Australian Government has also been working to support human rights, good governance and access to justice in the region. For example, across the Pacific region, Australia is working with judges, magistrates and court officers to strengthen their skills and improve the functioning of courts. The newly established Pacific Judicial Development Program supports activities like alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to address local community disputes in accessible and culturally appropriate ways. Australia also supports a biennial Pacific Chief Justices forum where judicial leaders across the Pacific have an opportunity to discuss issues of concern.

I look forward to the discussions of this year's theme – national institutions and economic, social and cultural rights, and the outcomes of the Advisory Council of Jurists' report on national institutions and the right to education.

Education is a key to building institutional capacity to support human rights in the region and around the world. The Australian Government recently released a *White Paper* on Australia's overseas aid program. Investing in people is a central theme in the *White Paper* and we will in future years be increasing aid investment in education.

Again, thank you to our hosts, to the Asia Pacific Forum and to other participants.