

Chapter 11:

International Activities

While the role and functions of HREOC as set out in legislation, are primarily directed towards human rights issues within Australia HREOC undertakes an international education and training role, with a specific focus on agencies in the Asia Pacific region.

In 2006–07, as in past years, most of this has taken the form of technical cooperation programs with other countries. These programs, which are based around sharing knowledge and expertise, are generally delivered through the framework of the Australian Government’s development cooperation program administered by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). This international technical cooperation work is externally funded (not from HREOC’s core budget which is devoted to fulfilling its domestic mandate).

These programs, along with HREOC’s participation in other international fora, such as the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, also provide a valuable way to keep abreast of international developments in human rights and models of best practice for national human rights institutions.

HREOC’s international role has evolved from the way that it has pursued its domestic responsibilities. It also reflects the organisation’s belief that helping to strengthen human rights protection in other countries has flow-on benefits for everyone, including Australia. The international work also provides staff development and gives wider international perspectives which enhance HREOC’s domestic work.

In undertaking these activities, HREOC engages with a variety of institutions and professionals relevant to the protection and promotion of human rights; for example, government agencies and civil society groups in other countries that are involved in the protection and promotion of human rights, and interested in how the Australian experience could be relevant to their country. The activities seek to strengthen the capacity of those institutions to protect human rights through the increased ‘professionalism’ of agencies involved in enforcing or implementing laws and the rule of law.

Many of HREOC’s international training activities involve a staged process of implementation, from initial scoping to design through to full implementation. This reflects the strong emphasis HREOC gives to detailed planning to ensure that the Australian input accords with the needs and priorities of overseas partner agencies.

It also reflects the fact that success in this area requires a gradualist approach, with substantive progress often being preceded by a lengthy process of establishing relationships and building confidence in the program. Concerted efforts are also made to ensure that partner agencies feel a sense of ownership of the program, which is essential to its success and long-term sustainability.

Most of the international training activities undertaken by HREOC centre on practical issues that affect the lives of individuals, such as domestic violence, police conduct, prison management, investigation techniques, human trafficking and so on. Notwithstanding this practical focus, efforts are made to ensure that the activities are firmly grounded in human rights principles set out in international law.

11.1 CHINA-AUSTRALIA HUMAN RIGHTS TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAM

HREOC's most substantial international program involvement is with the China-Australia Human Rights Technical Cooperation Program (HRTC), which is an integral part of Australia's annual inter-governmental Dialogue on Human Rights with China. HREOC participates in dialogue meetings and will attend the 2007 dialogue in July in Beijing.

The HRTC program encompasses three principal themes: protection of the rights of women and children; protection of ethnic minority rights; and reform of the legal system.

The program aims to provide an important information base of human rights principles, ideas and strategies which can be drawn upon in the development of Chinese policies and practices. The program includes activities conducted in both China and Australia. Each activity in the program is implemented as a cooperative venture between HREOC and particular Chinese organisations. Some selected examples of activities implemented in the 2006–07 HRTC Program are given below.

- In October 2006 a seminar on Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was held in Urumqi, Xinjiang Autonomous Region. The seminar aimed to assist the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies from the People's Republic of China (PRC) in implementing the recommendations of the United Nations ICESCR Committee following its consideration of China's first periodic report under that treaty.
- In November 2006 a Model United Nations was held in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, in cooperation with the United Nations Association. The activity simulated the proceedings of the UN Human Rights Council in the debate and adoption of resolutions on selected human rights issues.
- In December 2006 a seminar on the system of 'people's assessors' in China's courts was held in Haikou, Hainan Province. The seminar, conducted in cooperation with the National Judges' College of China, aimed to encourage the application of human rights principles in the development of the people's assessor system.

- In December 2006 a delegation from the Penitentiary Administration Bureau in the Ministry of Public Security visited Australia to study measures for protecting and promoting the rights of juvenile and female detainees.
- In February 2007 two officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrived in Australia to undertake postgraduate studies in human rights at the University of Melbourne.
- In March 2007 a delegation from the Supreme People's Procuratorate undertook a study visit to examine Australian measures for combating corrupt conduct by government officials.
- In March 2007 a delegation comprising officials from the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Justice of the Tibet Autonomous Region undertook a study visit to Australia. The focus of the visit was on measures to ensure the successful reintegration of prisoners into society following their release.
- In April 2007 a seminar on the Protection of the Rights of Juveniles in the Criminal Justice System was held in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. The seminar, held in cooperation with the Supreme People's Procuratorate, examined human rights based approaches to the administration of juvenile justice, with particular emphasis of restorative justice and diversionary programs.
- In April 2007 a Juvenile Justice Seminar was held in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, in cooperation with the Supreme People's Court. The seminar focused on protection of the rights of juveniles in the criminal justice system, including the role of children's courts.
- In March 2007 a Women's Law Workshop was held in Haikou, Hainan Province. The workshop, held in cooperation with the All-China Women's Federation, focused on implementation of China's Law on Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women. The workshop canvassed strategies for applying principles of human rights and gender equality into the implementation of the law.
- In April 2007 a Penitentiary Administration Seminar was held in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. The seminar, held in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Security built on the December 2006 study visit to Australia and engaged a larger group of penitentiary officials in discussion of human rights protection in the treatment of female and juvenile detainees.
- A human rights public education initiative was implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Association of China during the first half of 2007. This activity involved a national competition on human rights knowledge conducted through the national media in China.
- Two training programs on Human Rights and Family Planning were conducted during 2006–07 in cooperation with the National Population and Family Planning Commission. The training programs were held in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province in October 2006 and in Kunming, Yunnan Province, in March 2007. The training focused on measures for protecting and promoting human rights in the delivery of family planning and reproductive health services.

11.2 VIETNAM-AUSTRALIA HUMAN RIGHTS TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAM

HREOC also participates in the annual Australia-Vietnam Dialogue on International Organisations and Legal Issues, including Human Rights. HREOC attended the 2007 Dialogue held in Hanoi in April 2007.

A program of human rights technical cooperation with Vietnam was established as part of the dialogue and commenced in late 2006. The HRTC program with Vietnam focuses on four areas: access to justice; dissemination of information about legal rights and obligations; the rights of women; and raising awareness of international human rights treaty obligations. HRTC activities implemented in 2006–07 included the following:

- In October 2006 a delegation led by the Supreme People’s Court of Vietnam undertook a two-week study visit to Australia. The 10-member delegation examined Australian laws, procedures and practices for promoting access to justice through court processes and in the legal system generally.
- In January 2007 a Seminar on International Human Rights Treaties was held in Hanoi. This activity was conducted in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The seminar examined the content of human rights treaties to which Vietnam is a party as well as practical measures for compliance with treaty obligations.
- In April 2007 a Seminar on Dissemination of Legal Information was held in Hanoi, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. The seminar provided capacity building for the ministry in its role of disseminating information to government officials and the general population about legal rights and responsibilities under Vietnamese law.
- In May 2007 a Train-the Trainer Workshop was held in Hanoi in cooperation with the Vietnam Women’s Union. The theme was enhancing awareness of women’s rights, and the activity aimed to strengthen the training and advocacy skills of local women’s union staff.
- In June 2007 a further Seminar on International Human Rights Treaties was conducted with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This seminar was held in Da Nang and provided training for government officials in the central provinces.

11.3 LAOS-AUSTRALIA HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE

HREOC participated in the Laos-Australia Human Rights Dialogue meeting, held in Vientiane in October 2006.

11.4 INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

In addition to formal programs of bilateral technical cooperation, HREOC frequently receives international visitors and participates in meetings with representatives of

organisations concerned with human rights. A summary of these meetings is given below.

- In July 2006 HREOC hosted a meeting with a delegation led by the Deputy Chairperson of the Vietnam Women’s Union, Madame Nguyen Thi Thanh Hoa.
- In October 2006 HREOC met with the Vice-President of Vietnam, Madame Truong My Hoa, during her visit to Canberra.
- In May 2007 HREOC hosted a meeting with a delegation led by the Minister responsible for China’s National Population and Family Planning Commission, Mr Zhang Weiqing.
- In June 2007 HREOC hosted a meeting with a delegation led by the Vice-President of the All-China Women’s Federation, Madame Huang Qingyi.

11.5 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

HREOC also maintained involvement in a number of multilateral bodies concerned with the protection and promotion of human rights. International conferences and meetings HREOC participated in during 2006–07 included:

- Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, Suva, Fiji, 31 July – 3 August 2006
- Eighth International Conference for National Human Rights Institutions, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 24-26 October, 2006
- Eighteenth Session of the Annual Meeting of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 26-27 October, 2006
- Commonwealth Secretariat Conference of National Human Rights Institutions, London, United Kingdom, 26-28 February, 2007
- Meeting of Forum Councillors of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, Geneva, Switzerland, 20 March, 2007
- Nineteenth Session of the Annual Meeting of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, Geneva, Switzerland, 21-23 March, 2007
- Fourth Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva, Switzerland, March, 2007
- Fifth Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva, Switzerland, June, 2007
- Meeting of Senior Office Holders of Asia Pacific Forum with the Chair of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, Geneva, Switzerland, June, 2007.

