

Statement at 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 6: UPR Outcomes – Nauru

Thank you Mr President.

Respect for the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, support for a free press, the maintenance of an independent judiciary, and adequate space for civil society are all essential elements of a functioning democracy. They are also indispensable to sustainable development.

Despite this, in recent years each of these elements has been systematically attacked in Nauru as a veil of secrecy and repression has descended on the State.

Over the last three years, the government of Nauru has:

- Imposed significant restrictions and prohibitive visa application fees on journalists wanting to travel to the country, systematically denying requests from journalists and agencies – whether the ABC, Al Jazeera, the BBC or The Guardian – perceived to be independent or critical;
- Denied visit requests from both this Council's Special Procedures and leading international NGOs, such as Amnesty International;
- Censored the internet, including by blocking Facebook, a key communications channel to the outside world for refugees and asylum seekers in the Australian-controlled detention centre;
- Removed the Chief Justice and the Chief Magistrate;
- Suspended opposition parliamentarians and cancelled their passports;
- Criminalised peaceful protests; and
- Just last week, proposed prohibitive new fees in order for citizens to stand as candidates for parliament.

All of these moves coincide with Australia's opening of a major immigration detention centre in Nauru in late-2012. In a larger State, one that was not nestled in the Pacific and protected by a powerful self-interested neighbor, such regression would attract an international outcry.

Nauru's future does not lie in the warehousing of Australia's asylum seekers.

Instead, as recognised by the international community through Sustainable Development Goal 16, Nauru's future lies in establishing effective and accountable institutions and access to justice for all.

As reflected in UPR recommendations made by States including Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Timor Leste and Trinidad & Tobago, Nauru's future must be built on open and accountable government, an independent judiciary, a free media, access to information, and a vibrant and pluralistic civil society. We deeply regret that Nauru has merely noted rather than accepted most recommendations on these lines.

We urge Nauru to embrace these recommendations and for States with influence to be guided in their relationship with Nauru by these principles, rather than by myopic and misguided self-interest.

Thank you.