

A human rights act might have prevented atrocities

On December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations.

This seismic recognition of the intrinsic right of all to human dignity and agency is now celebrated annually as International Human Rights Day.

However, tomorrow's anniversary isn't only about looking in the rear-view mirror at that historic achievement.

It serves to remind us all now to look forward, and check whether and how we are delivering the intent and protections recognised by that

The world is hanging out for proper action to safeguard human rights, for the generations to come, writes **Meg Webb**

declaration. That action call is reflected in the 2024 Human Rights Day theme of "Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now".

There is an urgency for real action over lip-service on human rights globally and locally.

Yet at the same time, international devastating conflicts, climate crisis, growing inequalities and disruptive new technologies all appear insurmountable.

Even locally growing concerns over the apparent fragmenting of social cohesion, deepening inequalities, climate impacts and cost-of-living challenges can all feel overwhelming.

I'm not surprised when people ask what tangible difference a human rights Act would make for Tasmanians.

Crucially, human rights laws can provide a preventative, protective and transformative framework to drive

effective change now and for future generations.

Let's consider how a legislated human rights framework could have helped prevent and protect Tasmanians if it had existed over recent decades.

For example, the human rights abuses experienced by the Stolen Generation, the forced adoption survivors, and more recently, the



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Ashley Youth Detention Centre survivors may have been prevented.

Had the decision-makers of the time operated within a legislated framework requiring a transparent evaluation of human rights impacts, different and less harmful decisions may have resulted.

By embedding the systematic consideration of those rights within our policy making decisions, our budget setting priorities and our legislative debate processes we can transform our priority settings, and cultural norms.

But to drive that transformation we must heed the findings of the independent Tasmanian Law Reform

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like the Stolen Generation

Institute which has recommended Tasmania introduces a Human Rights Act, after finding our current human rights protection laws to be "fragmented", incomplete and incoherent.

The TLRI has recommended a Human Rights Act twice, once in 2007 and again in April this year.

Just as fragmented human rights protections can lead to the erosion of social cohesion, effective human rights laws are an investment in rebuilding social trust and strengthening good governance now and into the future.

UN high commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk recently stated:

"Human rights are not in crisis; I hear that much too often.

"What is really in crisis is the political leadership needed to make them a reality."

Sadly, Mr Türk could have been speaking specifically of the Tasmanian government, which hasn't even formally responded to the latest TLRI Human Rights Act report or its recommendations.

In contrast, the Legislative Council has voted twice in support of motions I have brought on for debate calling for action on a Tasmanian Human Rights Act.

In 2023 the upper house urged consultation to begin on draft

legislation, and most recently during the last sitting week this year the chamber voted in support of my call for the government to begin work on a Tasmanian Human Rights Act.

The leadership shown by the Legislative Council meets the recent challenge issued by the UN urging all policy makers to ensure their every decision takes into account its impact on human rights, our planet, and generations down the line.

Who could argue with that?

Tasmanians' rights, Tasmania's future, legislate now.

Meg Webb is the independent member for Nelson