

Joint letter

Discriminatory and unfair treatment against non-religious Australians

25 November 2025

Dear Attorney-General,

As a coalition of eight Australian non-religious, ex-religious and pro-secular groups, we write to raise our concerns about discriminatory and unfair treatment against non-religious Australians in breach of Australia's international human rights commitments.

In July this year, we made a joint submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) (Fourth Cycle) into Australia's human rights. The submission detailed a number of examples of discriminatory and unfair treatment against non-religious people, on the grounds of religion and belief, in Australian government institutions and programs.

These examples included:

- the imposition of acts of religious worship as part of formal proceedings in federal and state parliaments, and in local government meetings;
- the lack of non-religious frontline wellbeing support for the Australian Defence Force's majority non-religious workforce;
- the use of an inherently biased and coercive Census religion question that assumes all respondents have a religion;
- the state-sponsored disruption of public school students' formal academic learning time by poorly-attended religious instruction programs;
- the government funding of religious chaplains in government schools based on religious criteria for their employment;
- the advantages and benefits afforded to religious charities for 'advancing religion' in the nation's charities system, while the same opportunities are denied to groups with non-religious worldviews;
- the imposition of religion in military commemorations;
- exclusive opportunities afforded to religious organisations to form and be part of 'faith advisory committees' to governments.

This, however, was not intended to be an exhaustive list.

We have attached the full submission for your reference.

As we argued in the submission to the UPR, this discrimination in government institutions and programs impinges on the right to freedom of religion and belief for many Australians. As a result, religious people enjoy privileges that are not afforded to non-religious people. The imposition of religion erects barriers to equal participation and contributes to the alienation of non-religious and ex-religious people.

We believe this continued discriminatory and unfair treatment against non-religious people breaches Australia's commitments to international human rights treaties and declarations that protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and provide for equal treatment of religion and belief. These international commitments include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Also, Australia is a member of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance.

In our submission to the UPR, we noted that the Australian [Attorney-General's departmental website](#) recognises that such commitments apply equally to religious and non-religious beliefs. The website also explains that the government must ensure that legislation, policies and programs "respect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief", and may not impose religious or other beliefs. It adds:

The Government may also be obliged to take positive steps, where necessary and appropriate to protect this right...

We believe Australian governments, including the federal government, are not complying with international human rights obligations by ensuring that non-religious people are treated fairly and without discrimination in government institutions and programs.

Attorney-General, what actions will you take to address this discriminatory and unfair treatment against non-religious people, on the grounds of religion and belief, in government institutions and programs?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,



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