



MEDIA RELEASE
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Attack on ACT Civil Unions an Attack on Human Rights

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) are extremely disappointed at the Howard Government's announcement that it will disallow, by regulation, the ACT's Civil Union Act.

"The Civil Union Act does no more than eliminate discrimination in the ACT against people in same sex relationships or those who choose not to be married within traditional religious institutions. This latest move by Howard will further entrench discrimination against persons in such relationships Australia wide," said Amy Kilpatrick, ACT Convenor for ALHR.

"The Government's action directly contravenes fundamental human rights including – equal treatment before the law, protection of the family and the right of all men and all women to take part in cultural life. Australia has previously been criticised by the peak UN Human Rights Committee for denying same sex couples equal treatment under the law in contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

"The principles of equality of treatment and non-discrimination mean that gay and lesbian people have an equal right to participate in all aspects of our society. What could be a better indication of the inclusion of gay and lesbian people in our society than to allow them full recognition of their family relationships," said Ms Kilpatrick.

The Federal Government's move puts it out of step with similar laws in Tasmania and the UK.

"The move is blatantly anti-democratic. The ACT Government enacted the Civil Union Act in accordance with its mandate from the people of the ACT following a year long consultation process. Hundreds of submissions from ACT residents and civil society organisations commented on the Civil Union Bill. The Government's move to override this legislation is an unjustifiable exercise of Federal powers.

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