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21 April 2010

MEDIA RELEASE

Dismay at rejection of key human rights recommendations

Liberty Victoria has expressed its dismay at the Federal Government's rejection of key human rights recommendations made last year by the Brennan committee. It has branded the refusal to support a Human Rights Act, recommended by the committee, as cowardly and as a further sign that the Government has set its face squarely against human rights.

Liberty President, Michael Pearce SC, said the Brennan committee report showed there was widespread public support for a Human Rights Act. "However, the Government has been spooked by right wing lobby groups and lost its nerve on this important policy issue," he said. He called on the Government to regain control of the human rights agenda and have the courage of its convictions to introduce a Human Rights Act.

Mr Pearce said it was ironic that, in the same week when the Government announced a crackdown on asylum seekers, it also embraced the proposition that the best protection for human rights lay with our elected representatives and the political process. "In one breath the Government traduces the human rights of the most vulnerable people who come to this country to seek its protection and, in the next, it claims to be the true protector of human rights."

Mr Pearce said that a government which consigned asylum seekers to the most isolated desert prison to wait, possibly indefinitely, until their claims for asylum were processed had lost all credibility on human rights. "Today's rejection of a Human Rights Act is the final nail in the coffin of the Government's human rights reputation," he said.