

Media Advisory

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Australia: Undermining the UN?

In the light of the Australian government's recent attack on the UN human rights system, Amnesty International today sent an open letter to Prime Minister John Howard urging him to act in the spirit of the Millennium Summit by giving his full and effective support to all UN human rights mechanisms.

The Australian government has caused profound international concern over its 29 August announcement that it would be pulling out of certain UN human rights obligations. The government's announcement sent a disturbing message to the international community.

The Australian government is setting a bad example to other countries wishing to avoid international scrutiny and the announcement could act as an invitation for them also to limit their involvement in the UN human rights system.

Only last year a government delegation told the General Assembly, that "the UN treaty body system contributes significantly and directly to the protection and promotion of human rights". This reversal suggests the change in policy has more to do with a government embarrassed by recent UN criticism over its human rights record than constructive UN reform.

"As heads of government meet to discuss progress in the new millennium, the Australian Prime Minister will be struggling to reconcile his government's new policy with the UN Secretary-General's Millennium

Summit appeal for universal ratification of core human rights treaties," Amnesty International said.

The letter urges the Prime Minister to reassess Australia's policy so that it will resume its traditional leadership role in strengthening the UN human rights system rather than seeking to undermine it.

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