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Australia shies away from UN scrutiny

By deciding to review Australia's participation in UN treaty committees, the government shows a deplorable lack of respect for and understanding of the crucial role they play within the UN human rights system, Amnesty International said today.

"It comes as no surprise that the government does not accept scrutiny of its record -- not a single UN committee criticism has been seriously considered by the current administration."

Australia's own diplomacy has helped build up the UN human rights committee system, Australian diplomats co-select committee experts and co-determine their mandate.

"By criticizing UN committees unfairly, the Howard Government is discrediting 55 years of hard work by Australian diplomats to build up a credible and effective UN treaty system. Australia's once excellent reputation on human rights is being further eroded," Amnesty International said.

"What message is the government sending to the world and Australians by suggesting it no longer accepts the mechanisms it has helped to create?" the organization asked.

Due to a backlog of reports to UN committees, Australia's human rights record will further come under the spotlight of at least three specialist human rights bodies over the next 12 months:

July 2000:	UN Human Rights Committee
Nov 2000:	UN Committee against Torture
April/May 2001:	UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Through these committees, the UN plays a crucial role in the promotion and protection of human rights everywhere - including in Australia.

Amnesty International is very concerned that the real reason for the government's review is political unwillingness to confront domestic human rights issues in accordance with international standards.

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