

United Nations Human Rights Council, 43rd session, 2 March 2020

Item 3 Interactive Dialogue Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief

Oral statement by the Human Rights Law Centre

Delivered by Edwina MacDonald

Madam President,

The Special Rapporteur has urged states to ensure protections for religious belief do not deny women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people their rights to equality, non-discrimination and access to healthcare.

As a Council member, Australia should be a leader in promoting women's sexual and reproductive health rights at home in Australia, as well as here at the UN.

But right now, the Australian Government is proposing unbalanced laws that would unacceptably prioritise the personal religious views of health practitioners at the expense of their patient's right to health.

The laws will make it harder for women in Australia to access essential reproductive healthcare, like contraception and abortion.

Doctor's personal religious views are already forcing many women to travel hundreds of kilometres to access a lawful health service.

No woman should have to fear being abandoned or discriminated against because of the personal religious views of their doctor.

As International Women's Day approaches, we call on all members of this Council to implement the Special Rapporteur's recommendations and for Australia to abandon its proposed discriminatory laws, and respect the right of women, and every person in Australia to access the healthcare they need.

Thank you.