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Australia must work to ensure AHRC remains fully compliant with Paris Principles

The Law Council of Australia is disappointed the Australian Human Rights Commission's (AHRC) reaccreditation as an A-status national human rights institution has been deferred by the international standards body, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

"The AHRC is a vital institution with an important mandate, and we support its role and work," Law Council of Australia President, Mr Tass Liveris said.

However, the Law Council has warned of the importance of ensuring support for the AHRC to fulfil its independent statutory mandate to protect and promote human rights in Australia and internationally.

"This is the first time the AHRC has been at risk of losing its A-status since the establishment of international standards in 1993. The GANHRI's decision that further consideration of the AHRC's re-accreditation application will be deferred for 18 months must put the Commonwealth on notice that immediate improvements need to be made."

The concerns raised by the GANHRI include issues previously highlighted by the Law Council of Australia.

"Institutions like the AHRC require transparent appointment processes and adequate funding in order to be able to carry out their responsibilities effectively," Mr Liveris said.

"In our 2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission we called on the Australian Government to adequately resource the AHRC to ensure it can effectively carry out its investigation, complaint and conciliation functions, its advocacy on human rights in laws and policies, and its public education function. This requires sustainable, ongoing baseline funding.

"We look forward to the Government addressing each matter noted by the GANHRI's Sub-Committee on Accreditation and ensuring Australia retains its A-status when it is reviewed in 15 months' time. Ensuring that this status is retained should be considered an important component of Australia's global engagement on human rights issues.

"The Law Council believes this is an opportunity for Australia to further reflect on its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. We are the only democratic nation that does not have a constitutional or statutory bill or charter of human rights.

"Pending the adoption of constitutional guarantees, the introduction of a statutory charter of human rights would be a positive step towards better protection of human rights. Therefore, the Law Council also supports the enactment of a Human Rights Act by the Commonwealth Parliament."

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The Law Council of Australia is the national voice of the legal profession, promoting justice and the rule of law.