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## Ratification of OPCAT a historic step towards improving conditions in detention

The Australian Government's ratification of the [Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture](#) (OPCAT) is a historic step in the campaign to end torture and improve conditions in Australian detention facilities.

OPCAT is designed to strengthen the protection of persons deprived of their liberty against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

It requires Australia to establish a system of regular visits, to be undertaken by independent international and national bodies, to all places of detention in Australia, including prisons, youth and immigration detention and mental health facilities.

Law Council of Australia President, Fiona McLeod SC, said the Law Council had long pressed for ratification, arguing that OPCAT will assist in preventing torture from occurring in any place of detention in Australia, by encouraging a culture of transparency and accountability.

"Today's ratification will build upon Australia's history as a nation determined to eradicate and prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment at home and abroad," Ms McLeod said.

"It will enhance the protection of the fundamental rights of people in detention in Australia and is a step towards improving conditions in detention facilities where required. Independent and regular external scrutiny will provide an incentive for those running detention facilities to develop effective prevention strategies.

"The Law Council encourages Commonwealth, state and territory governments to seize the opportunity that OPCAT provides to work together to address long-standing human rights concerns. This is especially in relation to the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in custody, and conditions in youth and immigration detention facilities," Ms McLeod said.

OPCAT has now been in force internationally for over five years.

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