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## Australia's election to Human Rights Council an opportunity to lead and to learn

Australia's election to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) is an excellent opportunity to both lead globally and learn locally, according to the Law Council of Australia.

Australia will take its seat on 1 January 2018 and will serve for a three-year term.

"Taking a seat on the Human Rights Council sends a strong message to our own human rights institutions, and to international institutions, that we are taking human rights very seriously," Ms McLeod said.

"It is, as the Foreign Minister noted, manifestly in our national interest to shape the work of the Human Rights Council and uphold the international rules-based order. As one of the 26 founding members of the United Nations, it is an international order with which Australia has a long and proud history.

"We are extremely pleased that the Foreign Minister has noted that Australia will use its position to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide. Although international momentum toward abolition has been significant, the continued presence of the death penalty in nations around the globe represents a blight on human rights. Having abolished the death penalty 50 years ago, Australia is in a strong position to lead on this issue.

"The position will also enable Australia to lead on gender equality and the rights of women. This is another area in which Australia has strong leadership credentials.

"We also have the opportunity to provide leadership on the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights," Ms McLeod said.

Ms McLeod noted that while there was ample opportunity for Australia to lead, it must also be open to using the increased focus on human rights to learn.

"We cannot be afraid to hear voices of criticism and voices of dissent, because they can shine a light on how we can solve our problems, and problems in the region.

"There are international and domestic concerns about our own adherence to human rights obligations, particularly with respect to the treatment of asylum seekers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' advancement – including high rates of incarceration. The election to the Human Rights Council offers a renewed opportunity to address these persistent concerns.

"This seat opens significant new international and domestic opportunities to champion Australia's commitment to human rights, let's ensure we use this time as best we can.

"The Law Council would also like to acknowledge Foreign Minister Julie Bishop for her tireless advocacy in pursuit of a seat on the Human Rights Council," Ms McLeod said.

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