

2014 Castan Centre / King & Wood Mallesons Annual lecture

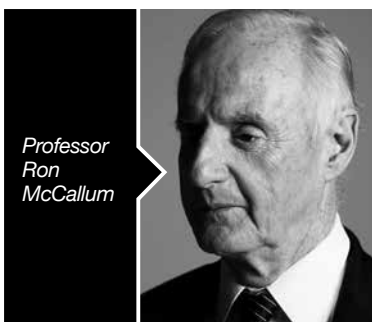
The 2014 Castan Centre / King & Wood Mallesons Annual lecture will be delivered by Professor Ron McCallum, who is currently vice-chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

"Nothing About Us Without Us", is the slogan of persons with disabilities. In his lecture, Professor McCallum will examine the national responses of thirteen countries, including Australia, to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This year's lecture will also officially mark the 50th anniversary of the Monash law faculty, to which Professor McCallum

contributed so much during nearly 20 years as a faculty member between 1975 and 1993. In addition to his role with the UN, Professor McCallum is an Emeritus Professor at Sydney University. He was recognised for his services to education, industrial relations, the visually impaired and social justice in 2006 when he was made an Officer in the Order of Australia and was also awarded senior Australian of the year 2011 in recognition of his work for equality of all Australians.

We would like to acknowledge the support of King & Wood Mallesons for this event which will be held on Friday 22nd August at the NAB building, 700 Bourke street Melbourne.



The 2014 Castan Human Rights Report



A relative holds a picture of a missing garment worker, who was in the Rana Plaza building when it collapsed in Bangladesh in 2013. Photo: Weronika

For the first time in 2014, the Castan Centre has published a report featuring fresh perspectives on many of its vital research areas.

The report – which contains contributions from most of the Centre's academics – is designed to improve the public's understanding of our world-renowned academic research.

The topics featured in the report include high profile issues such as asylum seekers, gender-based violence, terrorism laws and the federal government's hot-button issue of "freedom".

Regarding freedom, our Director, Sarah Joseph, said the recent narrow debate on the "right to be a bigot" had camouflaged the real effects of changes to legislation. "The 'bikie laws', police move-on powers, copyright laws, and even threats to remove government funding from artists are all reducing society's freedom," she said.

Centre Associate Dr Heli Askola wrote on gender-based violence, saying that the recent spate of domestic violence cases shows that the existing laws are not going far enough to protect the most vulnerable in our society. "Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women has the potential to create change, however it must be backed up with sufficient funding and better implementation," Dr Askola said.

Current terrorism laws in Australia also need closer consideration, according to Dr Patrick Emerton. "ASIO's excessive powers to make 'predictive judgments' about potential terrorists – such as 'adverse assessments' of bona fide refugees – threaten human rights," Dr Emerton said. "For this reason ASIO's powers must be brought into line with human rights norms."

On the issue of asylum seeker rights, Dr Azadeh Dastyari identified at least seven international laws breached by current asylum seeker and refugee policies and practices. "Contrary to the Australian government's oft-repeated assertion that it respects asylum seekers' rights, the current situation doesn't reflect this," she said.

Other academics featured in the report have written on areas that receive less attention, and often less sympathy. Prison overcrowding is a festering issue in Australia (and particularly Victoria), while conditions in other "closed environments" such as detention centres and "closed" mental health facilities also threaten people's basic human rights. Meanwhile, sporadic news coverage belies the continuing battle in this country over reproductive rights, Indigenous issues, LGBTI rights and women's issues. And, internationally, debates rage over the role of corporations and aid agencies, particularly in the developing world.

The report is designed to be accessible to the general public. Each piece is written in plain English and informs the reader about human rights law and policy issues in key areas. There are no footnotes or case citations, although the web version contains a list of further reading for each article.

Although the report cannot hope to cover all of the pressing human rights issues here and around the globe, its articles help to shed light on some of the important debates that the Centre's academics grapple with every day.

You can download a pdf of the report or read the HTML version online by visiting the Castan Centre website and following the links. Each contribution has also been published on the Centre's blog site (castancentre.com).