Foreign Policy- White Paper Submission

Name: Sowmiya Sooriakumaran

I am a Public Health graduate, pursuing my further studies in Law. I have a strong passion for human rights violation in regards to refugee and asylum seekers as well as health related issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention.

HIV Prevention: PrEP

I have had the opportunity to work with Senator Janet Rice to develop a policy brief on the issue of the HIV prevention drug PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and its access in Australia. The Australian Government recognised PrEP as an effective HIV prevention strategy in the recently launched *7th National HIV Strategy 2014 - 2017*. Despite this recognition, PrEP has not been approved for use in Australia. Trials of PrEP have shown it is highly effective at stopping the transmission of HIV, and that it will play an important part in supporting Australia to reach the goal of virtually eliminating HIV transmissions by 2020. However, this may not be possible if countries such as Australia are delaying this process by not allowing such a vital and beneficial drug to be subsided by the Government and be available on the Pharmaceuticals Benefits Scheme. It is commended however, the number of state governments who are trialling PrEP and making PrEP available, especially in support of those in the LGBTIQ community who are at a greater risk of HIV compared to the rest of the population group.

Refugee and Asylum Seekers

I would like to gain more knowledge about poverty in regards to human rights, refugee & asylum seeker rights, women's rights and Indigenous rights globally and nationally. I would like to create more awareness of how and why in certain parts of the world basic freedom and protection that people are entitled to are violated. There is strong evidence that the legal recognition and protection of human rights is an important factor contributing to the realisation of human rights for refugees on the ground. Despite this, Australia is the only modern developed democracy not to enshrine human rights in a national law. During my volunteer role at Refugee Legal, I witnessed many helpless, yet hopeful individuals who rely on volunteer solicitors to help them with their immigration applications as they fear a

departure back to their poverty stricken, war torn countries where a sense of basic human rights is violated.

I am passionate about working towards remedying human rights atrocities happening around the world, such as the 25 year civil war which occurred in Sri Lanka. This is what really sparked my long-term interest in studying law and my strong passion towards the issues of human rights –this stems coming from a Sri Lankan background having family members who lived through and were affected by the war crimes. My parents were lucky to have migrated to Australia during the worst of times, and as immigrants they have always been very grateful for the opportunity to be able to live here.

Australia is now home to thousands of Sri Lankan refugees who witnessed potential war crimes in the final stages of the brutal civil war. Sri Lanka had promised a judicial process that would involve international judges and prosecutors- but it's now backing away from that commitment. Sri Lankan war crimes victims living in Australia say they would not trust a Sri Lankan court to hear their testimony. I may not have been able to help the helpless in Sri Lanka, but I am able to help them here in Australia. I want to be a strong advocate for Refugee people whether they are from Sri Lanka or any part of the world. The situation in which these people arrive here are nothing we, as Australians can even imagine. I want to be a familiar face for them to rely on, and fight for their rights and safety in a country they have come running to with no hope. The people who were affected by the war do not seek to glorify war, because as victims they know too well the pain and the suffering that a brutal war brings in its trail. As a fellow Sri Lankan, we do seek to remember, honour and mourn our war dead, deep within our hearts with gratitude and humility - for their immense bravery, dedication and sacrifice in the liberation struggle to save our nation.

The law, however, supports the violation of basic civil liberties and renders irrelevant in Sri Lanka the right to a fair trial. In its application it has been a lesson in the selective application of extraordinary security powers and the politicisation of law enforcement. The PTA needs to be abolished and comprehensive measures needs to be taken to deliver justice to those who have been denied it. We, as Australians, should give voice to support these people who have been so abused, and I as an Australian and future lawyer will.