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Crunch time for children's human rights in Australia

As Australia's Senators debate mandatory detention of juveniles, Amnesty International urged them to give life to the children's human rights the government has promised to protect.

The welcome findings of the Senate committee's report on mandatory detention assert federal responsibility for ensuring that Australia's international obligations are met.

"Today's parliamentary debate is crunch time for respect for international treaties. If Australia wants to be taken seriously, it cannot pick and choose which treaty obligations matter," the human rights organization said.

This is the second parliamentary report in two years recommending alternatives to mandatory detention. If this crucial children's rights issue is not resolved domestically, Australia risks facing further embarrassment before the United Nations (UN) this year.

Under mandatory detention laws the courts cannot sentence children according to the seriousness of the crime, their maturity or circumstances. Nor can reparations to victims be taken into account in a mandatory prison term.

"The findings on mandatory detention are clear -- it does not serve the community or provide justice for victims. The interests of

Australian children should not be subject to politics. Those responsible for upholding Australian values and obligations should take decisive action."

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