

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person

**Entry ID:** AWE5718

## Kayess, Rosemary

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**Occupation** Academic, Advisor, Disability rights activist, Lawyer

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### Summary

Rosemary Kayess has devoted her career to the study and promotion of human rights and discrimination law in Australia and internationally. She has made a significant contribution to the disability rights movement. Currently a Visiting Fellow and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales, Kayess was appointed to the Australian Government delegation responsible for drafting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Since 2009 Kayess has been a member of the AusAID Disability Reference Group; in 2010 she was appointed Director of the Human Rights and Disability Project at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). Kayess became Senior Research Fellow at the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW in 2011.

Rosemary Kayess was interviewed by Kim Rubenstein for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Oral History Project. For details of the interview see the National Library of Australia [CATALOGUE RECORD](#).

## Details

Rosemary Kayess graduated from the University of New South Wales with a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Social Science (Honours). She also has an Associate Diploma of Management (Community Organisations) and a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice from the College of Law.

When she was twenty, Kayess was in a serious car accident in which she sustained a spinal injury. The event set her on the path to her subsequent career.

From 1989 to 1995, Kayess was Director of Spinal Cord Injuries Australia while also serving on the Ethics Committee at the Benevolent Society of New South Wales and as Director of the Physical Disability Council of New South Wales.

Since 1995, Kayess has been Chairperson of the Australian Centre for Disability Law. The Centre promotes and protects the human and legal rights of people with disabilities by providing them with access to legal advocacy. Kayess was subsequently appointed to the Disability Council of New South Wales in 1996, serving until 2000. In 1996 Kayess was honoured with a University of New South Wales Alumni Award.

In 2004 – 2006, Kayess was appointed to the Australian Government delegation responsible for drafting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention) [Lannen]. After the drafting process had been completed, Kayess tirelessly promoted the Convention at workshops and human rights forums, arguing for its ratification by the Australian Government. In 2008 the Rudd Government ratified the Convention, thereby providing a basis for social inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of society.

According to Kayess, the timing of her involvement with the Convention was significant in setting a new direction for her academic career: “International human rights was my area of focus and the Convention negotiations came up and it really was this one-in-a-lifetime chance and I was incredibly lucky to be involved. My academic work has sort of revolved in the past 10 years around the development of the Convention. I was appointed to the Australian Government delegation for the negotiation process and you know it’s sad to say, but it really is the peak of an international lawyer’s career to be involved in those types of negotiation processes” [Lannen].

From 2008 to 2009, Kayess was Director of the Disability Studies and Research Centre at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). In this role, Kayess was an advocate for the disability sector, often called upon for public comment and analysis on behalf of those with disabilities affected by unemployment and limited access to further education [ABC].

At UNSW’s 2009 Protecting Human Rights Conference at the Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law, Kayess spoke about the daily human rights violations which people with disabilities encounter, such as a lack of adequate accommodation, being forced to live in institutional care, and education segregation. These matters continue to occupy Kayess’ work in a domestic and international context. Since 2009, Kayess has been a member of the Department Foreign Affairs and Trade Disability Reference Group; in 2010 she was appointed Director of the Human Rights and Disability Project of the Australian Human Rights Centre of the Faculty of Law, UNSW [Vision 2020].

From 2010 to 2014 Kayess was the Senior Visiting Research Fellow on the Disability Rights Expanding Accessible Markets (DREAM) Project. “The primary aim of the DREAM Project is to professionally develop and educate the next generation of disability policy researchers and entrepreneurs to assist the European Union and its Member States in their efforts to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” [Disability Rights]. The project provided Kayess with the opportunity to continue her ground-breaking work on the Convention at an international level.

In 2011 Kayess, a Visiting Fellow and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales, was appointed Senior Research Fellow at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales.

Kayess has devoted her career to disability policy and reform. She has advised on the many issues that intersect with the disability sector, including housing, education, guardianship, employment and domestic and international human rights. An expert member of the Australian Government delegation to the United Nations negotiations for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Kayess continues to be a tireless advocate for those with disabilities in Australia.

## Published resources

### Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

## Archival resources

### National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Rosemary Kayess interviewed by Kim Rubenstein in the Trailblazing women and the law oral history project](#)

**Author Details**

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**Digital resources**

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