



OPENING STATEMENT

**Public Hearing
Human Rights Sub-Committee
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Inquiry into Australia's Advocacy for the Abolition of the Death Penalty**

20 November 2015
Sydney

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. We commend the Minister and the Committee for this inquiry and support all efforts to enhance Australia's advocacy for the global abolition of the death penalty. How encouraging it is to be talking about this the day after Indonesia announces that it will implement a moratorium on the death penalty.

As we noted in our submission, there is a long-standing and strong tradition of Christian opposition to the death penalty. The death penalty undermines the Christian belief that every life is precious because every person is a child of God. The death penalty is an offence against the gift of life, denies the hope we have in the universal potential for personal transformation and, by denying mercy and forgiveness, undermines an important element of what makes for healthy societies.

As a strong and active supporter of abolition over a long period of time, Australia has an important role to play in global efforts to limit, reduce and abolish the use of the death penalty. We are pleased to know that, should Australia be successful in the bid for a seat on the Human Rights Council, death penalty abolition will be a priority. We commend the Foreign Minister's direction to DFAT to develop a whole-of-government strategy.

We note that the UK Strategy developed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office might provide a useful model for an Australian strategy. In particular, it contains a strong statement of opposition to the death penalty “in all cases and as a matter of principle” and articulates the reasons for this stance and the vision of the country for eventual global abolition. It is based on three clear goals, describes strategies and highlights five priority countries determined by a set of five criteria. It also includes a ‘second tier’ of priority countries identifying which of the three goals would be the most effective focus of diplomatic efforts in each country.

Our submission highlights a number of areas that we believe could be fruitful if included in such a strategy, some of which build on already existing initiatives and programs and some that would be new.

The goals of the strategy could include:

- shifting countries that are abolitionist in practice or abolitionist for ordinary crimes only, to complete abolition;
- a reduction in the types of crimes subject to the death penalty; and
- increasing support for UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly anti-death penalty resolutions.

The strategy should include bilateral objectives especially designed for particular countries; greater and more strategic support of civil society advocates and programs, for example, small grants programs; and a focus on the issue of drug-related offences.

The Pacific region is almost entirely abolitionist and so we believe that a regional coalition of abolitionist states could play a global leadership role for the promotion of a moratorium on the death penalty.

We believe that the mere fact of an Australia strategy would help to separate the Government’s advocacy for the abolition of death penalty from our engagement with countries on trade, military and other issues.

Our international advocacy should be supported by domestic legislation that reflects our concerns and so we would like to see the setting of clear conditions for Australian support of counter-narcotics agencies or campaigns in countries where the death penalty is practised and laws to prohibit the Australian Federal Police sharing information when it could potentially result in the death penalty.

Most importantly, we would encourage the Government to be consistent and clear in its public statements about the death penalty, regardless of the crime and country.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to talk with you and we are happy to answer any questions you might have.