



434 / 725

THE HON BRENDAN O'CONNOR MP

Minister for Home Affairs
Minister for Justice

11/2210, MC-AG11/04921

25 MAY 2011

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 6 April 2011 relating to a petition recently submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding support for programs to combat child sex tourism. The following letter responds to the request contained in the petition that the Government fund an ongoing education campaign and support service to help Australians to identify and report suspicions or concerns about child sex offenders who travel overseas. I understand that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, has written to you separately regarding the second part of the petition, which calls for funding for community-based international development programs on child sex trafficking and child sex tourism.

I appreciate the petitioners' concerns regarding child sex tourism. The Government shares these concerns and will continue to invest considerable resources as part of a comprehensive suite of measures to combat these heinous crimes.

As part of this commitment, the Government recently made significant reforms to laws dealing with child sex abuse in areas of Commonwealth responsibility, including child sex tourism laws and online child pornography laws. The *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences Against Children) Act 2010* has strengthened existing offence regimes, including through the raising of maximum penalties. The most serious offences now carry penalties of up to 25 years imprisonment. The new laws also make it an offence to engage in steps leading up to child sex tourism offences, allowing law enforcement to intervene before a potential offender leaves Australia and long before a child is harmed.

The new laws are reinforced by a range of practical measures designed to ensure Australians are able to identify and report these abuses when they see them.

The Government recently funded a range of measures aimed at alerting travellers to the new laws and advising members of the public to contact the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to report suspicious behaviour. These measures, which were rolled out across Australia, included print and online advertising, an information brochure and fact sheet for distribution by relevant government agencies, non-government organisations and members of the travel industry, and the display of signage at Australia's international airports.

The Government also provides information on child sex tourism through its travel advisory and consular assistance service, smarttraveller, and disseminates the free publication *Travel Smart: Hints for Australian Travellers* with each Australian passport issued, which includes details for reporting a possible violation of Australia's child sex laws to the AFP.

These measures complement ongoing work by the AFP to monitor child sex tourists both within Australia and overseas, and work with international law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute child sex offenders.

While we welcome Child Wise's offer to provide an ongoing education campaign and support service to help Australians identify and report suspicions about child sex tourism, the Government believes that Commonwealth funding for child protection and law enforcement is best directed to other areas, such as those described above, at this time.

I am confident that Government activities will continue to complement efforts by Child Wise and The Body Shop to promote awareness of child sexual exploitation, including through the *Stop Sex Trafficking of Children and Young People Campaign*, and make a positive contribution to preventing child sex tourism.

Thank you for drawing this petition to my attention. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Brendan O'Connor