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**THE HON JULIE BISHOP MP**

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Dr Dennis Jensen MP  
Chair of the Standing Committee on Petitions  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Jensen

Thank you for your letter of 29 May 2014 regarding the petition received by your committee about Christians in Syria.

I am gravely concerned by the effect the ongoing conflict in Syria is having on that country's diverse religious communities. The Syrian people have suffered appalling violence by the parties to the conflict. There have been numerous worrying incidents where individuals, including Christians, have been targeted on the basis of their religion. Australia condemns all such attacks.

The Australian Government's response to the humanitarian crisis has been generous, with \$130.8 million provided for humanitarian assistance since 2011. Australia's assistance is channelled through UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations to ensure a coordinated response to the crisis.

The parties to the conflict, and particularly the Syrian regime, have arbitrarily denied humanitarian access to some parts of Syria. As a member of the UN Security Council, Australia co-sponsored Resolution 2139 which demands that the parties allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to people in need. With other Council members, we are monitoring the implementation of this resolution and working to ensure the Council responds to non-compliance.

The Syrian conflict urgently needs a political solution. The Government continues to call for an inclusive political process in which all of Syria's communities, including Christians, have a voice. Freedom of religion and belief is a core human right and this freedom must be respected in all countries.

Yours sincerely

Julie Bishop

**20 JUN 2014**