



Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

2 October 2015

Dear Committee,

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Human Rights Law Centre, Reprieve Australia, Australians Detained Abroad, Civil Liberties Australia, and the NSW Council Civil Liberties welcome the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into Australia's Advocacy for the Abolition of the Death Penalty.

In May 2015, we jointly published a policy paper *Australian Government and the Death Penalty: A Way Forward*. In that paper, we outlined our ongoing concern regarding the death penalty, and called on the Australian Government to take a more proactive approach to ending the death penalty, everywhere.

While some of us will be making separate submissions to the Inquiry, we want to use this opportunity to reinforce the calls we made in the earlier policy paper.

We reiterate our aim to ensure that Australian public policy properly reflects our status as an abolitionist country. To do this, Australia needs to reassess its approach to the death penalty in both domestic and foreign policy. Our paper made four calls to action to ensure Australian public policy better advocated for the death penalty's abolition:

1. Develop a new Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade public strategy document aimed at ending the death penalty everywhere;
2. Use Australia's aid programs to support civil society organisations campaigning for abolition in retentionist countries;
3. Join forces with other nations - through the United Nations and other multilateral and regional bodies - to push for universal adoption of a global moratorium on the death penalty;

4. Amend Australian laws to prohibit the Australian Federal Police from sharing information with other law enforcement agencies that could potentially result in suspected perpetrators facing the death penalty.

As an abolitionist country, Australia is part of a worldwide movement opposing the death penalty. In 1977 only 16 countries had abolished capital punishment. Now 140 countries have done so in law or practice – in recognition that the death penalty is a cruel and inhuman punishment.

Despite this, in 2014, Amnesty International recorded over 607 executions worldwide and almost 20,000 people sitting on death row.

Australia has an important role to play as an Asia-Pacific nation. In 2014, the Pacific was the only region in the world which was death penalty free, but in Asia the death penalty remains prevalent.

We are pleased the Committee is now undertaking this review of Australia's advocacy against the death penalty. Global momentum over the past forty years has been towards abolition. However, the time is right to take stock of Australia's approach, examine how Australia can better campaign, and reach concrete policy outcomes to ensure the death penalty is abolished worldwide.

Please find enclosed a copy of *Australian Government and the Death Penalty: A Way Forward – May 2015*.