

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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Senator Sarah Henderson
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human
Rights
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Senator Henderson

SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Amnesty International welcomes this opportunity to submit to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights in relation to the government's response to COVID-19.

Ultimately, all measures taken by the government must align with its obligations to uphold human rights standards. The human rights obligations of each state are outlined in the attached document: Responses to [Covid-19 and State Human Rights Obligations](#). The Australian government must take all necessary steps to ensure that vulnerable people in the community aren't adversely affected by implementation of such reforms. No one should be denied their rights because of who they are, where they live, or what they do.

Some groups are at greater risk of severe impact if they contract the virus, including older persons and persons with prior health conditions. Others are at greater risk of contracting the virus because of where they live and the preventive measures they have access to: for example, Indigenous people, people in prisons, people who are homeless, and people who work in environments where there is no physical distance between co-workers, may face difficulties self-isolating or ensuring social distancing, and hence face a greater risk of exposure to the virus. Similarly, people living in poverty may not be able to afford necessary preventive equipment or have access to adequate water and sanitation facilities.

The lockdown measures that have been imposed to reduce the spread of the virus are particularly adversely impacting the livelihoods of people with precarious work arrangements and those with little or no social security protections, including people in the informal sector, working in the 'gig' economy, irregular migrants, sanitation workers, migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers.. Groups that have faced structural discrimination and marginalisation are likely to feel compounded effects in the current context, including in terms of access to health care as well as social security protections.

Amnesty International has received reports of:

- Indigenous people in remote communities who are having difficulty finding accommodation, and getting access to government support that has been announced in recent weeks;
- Overreach of police and authorities in upholding COVID-19 regulations
- Targeting by police and authorities of vulnerable groups when upholding COVID-19 regulations

Recommendations

As part of any legislative reform to combat the pandemic, the Australian Government must:

- Ensure that all people have equal and adequate access to health care (including preventive care, treatment, as well as any vaccines or cures that may be discovered); housing (including the ability to self-isolate and to maintain any recommended social distancing); water and sanitation; and social security, inclusive to all and free from discrimination;
- Account for the specific needs of particular groups while designing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. No one should be left behind in the response. As part of the government's existing stimulus package, targeted measures to provide relief to particular vulnerable groups who are not accessing it and who need it most, should be put in place.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha Klintworth
National Director
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