



THE HON JULIE BISHOP MP

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr Chris Crewther MP
Chair
Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
CANBERRA ACT 2600


Dear Mr Crewther

Thank you for your letter of 7 September 2017 seeking advice on how the Australian Government can address the exploitation of children in orphanages overseas and your request to ban Australians from engaging in orphanage tourism.

I am concerned that tourism-linked visits to orphanages can encourage unscrupulous operators, which can put vulnerable children at risk. I have asked the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to develop a campaign to raise awareness on 'smart volunteering' and the risks of 'orphanage voluntourism'. The campaign will work with the tourism sector, reputable NGOs and the Department of Education to promote the benefits of due diligence when volunteering, especially with children. It will aim to minimise the risk of Australians inadvertently supporting 'sham orphanages' and encourage support for organisations and programs that have strong child protection safeguards in place. It would highlight alternative pathways for people to volunteer overseas that have positive benefits for overseas communities and for Australians.

The issues surrounding residential care and orphanages are complex. The best interests of children are paramount. While it is clear that institutional care is best provided as an option of last resort, aimed at promoting longer-term reintegration into family or community, it is important to recognise that in some contexts, this kind of care is the only option available for vulnerable children. I am concerned that an immediate blanket ban on all Australians donating to, or volunteering in, orphanages overseas may have unforeseen consequences for children and reputable organisations working to help communities overseas.

The Government has a zero tolerance approach to child exploitation or abuse. The DFAT Child Protection Policy covers all activities funded by DFAT, including funding of charities through the Australian aid program. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure that charities funded to deliver activities overseas undertake due diligence on child protection. Robust fraud and contractual mechanisms and regular monitoring help to ensure that activities are consistent with good development practice. DFAT does not support orphanages through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, the Government's largest NGO grant program.

I note that the inquiry into the introduction of a Modern Slavery Act is ongoing and I will continue to work with DFAT on this matter.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Julie Bishop

16 OCT 2017