

Submission from John Martinkus regarding inquiry into Australian Kidnapped abroad.

To whom it may concern,

I have attached a detailed chronological account of my experience being kidnapped in Iraq in October 2004 and the subsequent actions of the Foreign Minister, Dfat and the Australian Federal Police. I will address the terms of reference in the context of my experience as outlined in the supporting statement.

(a) the effectiveness of the Australian Government's response to Australian citizens who are kidnapped and held for ransom overseas, including but not limited to the response of the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the consular assistance in the relevant country;

The response of DFAT officials in Iraq was to misinform the minister as to what had actually happened and was wholly inadequate in my case. DFAT could have sought to withhold comment on my case until they had spoken to me. Instead they seemed to be intent on trying to downplay my story and ultimately sought to discredit me and damage my reputation as a journalist by officially doubting my story long after the event without ever seeking to clarify events with myself. They have never contacted me over this issue and offered me no assistance whatsoever.

(b) how the Australian Government's response in these situations compares to the approach taken by other countries;

Then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer greatly increased my distress and trauma and sought to damage my reputation as a journalist to make a political point about the situation in Iraq. No individual in the situation I was in should have to be ridiculed by their own government. The minister must respect the rights of journalists to engage in their profession, especially in conflict zones where Australian troops are involved. The former foreign minister Alexander Downer should unreservedly apologize to me for his statements regarding my kidnapping in 2004.

(c) measures that could be taken by the Australian Government to improve the handling of its assistance to Australian citizens and their families; and

In future DFAT officials could seek to be properly informed about issues before incorrectly briefing the minister and should refrain from imposing their preconceived and institutionally biased opinions onto the victims case.

(d) any other related matter.

What I also wanted to do was hold to account the former foreign minister Alexander Downer, the DFAT staff who dealt with this case and their supporters in the press. I wanted to ensure that in the future no other journalist has to endure the

psychological pressure of being discredited and attacked politically in the immediate aftermath of a deeply traumatising event.

Yours Sincerely

John Martinkus