

Submission by VOICE Australia  
to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into  
**Australia's efforts to advocate for the  
worldwide abolition of the death penalty**

18 July 2024

**The death penalty can have implications beyond humanitarian ones.** For example, some executions have been used to cover up corruption or incompetence by the ruling class in Vietnam – a dead man can't talk. And some countries could use death row inmates to bargain with Australia.

**This VOICE Australia Submission addresses these Terms Of Reference:** 2. (international engagement – we focus on *Australians* rather than the government;) and 3.c) (civil society – those in Australia *and* those in death-penalty countries).

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*RECOMMENDATION 1- On DFAT's travel advisory webpages (eg. [smartraveller.gov.au](https://smartraveller.gov.au)), give visual indicators (eg. red-amber-green dots) for key information, eg. death penalty, and consular assistance*

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**The indicators inform and attract webpage visitors' attention** (just when that attention is most productive). They can be information-rich – for example, a dot may flash red to indicate that this country has executed Australians recently, or display its numeric ranking from a credible survey about the death penalty.

**Additional indicators could also be used** – for example, to indicate whether a consular agreement exists which gives consulate officials extensive rights to access and assist Australians in that country.

**Because webpage visitors are seeking out the information,** the countries concerned cannot accuse Australia of publicly naming and shaming them. This should allay DFAT's concerns, if any, about maintaining good relations.

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*RECOMMENDATION 2- Cement Australians' attitude against the death penalty, and help Australians to spread the abolition message to death-penalty countries. Do this by first crowd-sourcing from grassroots Australians, then using government resources to amplify their best messages and methods*

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**Parts of Australia's multicultural society come from death-penalty societies** wherein the death penalty hardly stirs debate. Therefore, there is a need to build and cement Australians' support for abolition.

**Additionally, every day thousands of Australians travel overseas or** converse with people overseas who trust them. There is a need for abolition food-for-thought messages that are well-formed to be readily internalised by such Australians, and to *naturally weave into* everyday conversations. Forming such messages and devising methods to use them, is not a trivial task.

### **How to meet the above 2 needs?**

**Option 1** is for the government to contract marketing companies to devise and promote its messages.

**Option 2** is for grassroot Australians to be involved. For example,

- a school could get a grant to run song-writing competitions, or
- an ethnic association could get a grant to encourage ethnic community members to devise such messages, in their language.

**Option 3, which VOICE Australia recommends,** combines 1's and 2's best virtues. In other words, *first, crowd-source from Australians, then use government capability to amplify their best results.* For example,

- provide grants to professionally produce and promote catchy and effective songs written by students, and
- run campaigns for Australians originally from death-penalty countries to internalise selected messages (then, the abovementioned DFAT travel advisory webpages can point to them)

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*RECOMMENDATION 3- Assist grassroots abolitionist groups overseas to do their work. Don't leave out groups that are not officially registered. The assistance could be provided through Australia's own civil society*

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**Foreign governments watch their citizens' opinion** before they would modify their death penalty stance. The will must come from the peoples.

**Some such citizens travel to Australia**, where campaigns mentioned in Recommendation 2 could target them, giving food for thought to bring home.

**This Recommendation 3, however, is about peoples in their own countries.** For that, local grassroots groups are best placed. They could research local attitudes, submit proposals to their elected representatives, create short video stories encompassing their messages, etc.

**Australia should assist overseas grassroots groups, including those not officially registered.** Why? Because some death-penalty governments are authoritarian or otherwise disallow legal registration for grassroots groups against the death penalty. If Australia assists only registered groups, this won't work as well. Australia should be prepared to give small grants to grassroots groups overseas that do effective work, without requiring registration as a precondition.

**This assistance could also be provided through Australia's own civil society** as part of their work against the death penalty. This should allay DFAT's concern, if any, about being seen as funding local groups which their governments are displeased with.

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