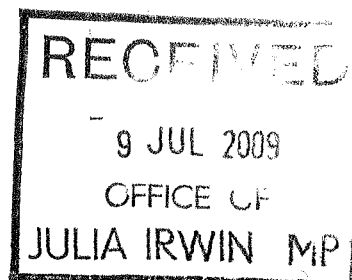




THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Mrs Julia Irwin MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600



- 1 JUL 2009

*Julia*

Dear Madam Chair

Thank you for your letter dated 11 June 2009 about a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding apostasy laws.

The Australian Government shares the view that Muslims, or indeed persons of any religion, should be able to choose freely to leave their faith and follow a new belief, without penalty.

As the petition notes, the right to freedom of religion, including the right to change religion, is set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

In support of this right, Australia has consistently co-sponsored a resolution on the 'Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance' in the United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee. This resolution urges states to "ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief to all without distinction, inter alia, by the provision of effective remedies in cases where the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, or the right to practise freely one's religion, including the right to change one's religion or belief, is violated".

The Australian Government makes regular human rights representations to a number of countries, including those that place restrictions on freedom of religion. We will continue to be alert to opportunities to raise the issue of religious freedom, including the issue of apostasy, in our representations.

Thank you for bringing the petition to the attention of the Government.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Smith