



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PETITIONS

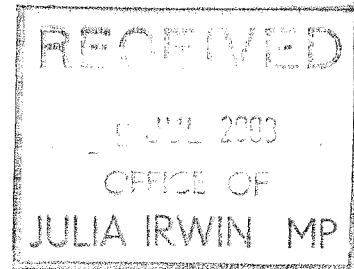
received 11.7.08

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

7 JUL 2008



Dear Madam Chair

Thank you for your letter dated 27 May 2008, regarding a petition recently submitted for consideration by the Standing Committee on Petitions. This letter responds to the petition, as required by Standing Order 209(b).

Regarding the three specific requests made by the petitioners, I am advised that the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (the Act), which is administered under the portfolio of Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, requires all free-to-air commercial broadcasters ensure that 55 per cent of their content broadcast between 6am and midnight is Australian programming. The Act also provides for the identification and resolution of inappropriate content. There is no provision in the Act to specify content beyond this and no scope for the Government to insist on broadcasters running programs or advertisements on specific matters. The broadcasting of specific programs or advertisements is a commercial matter.

More generally, the Australian Government shares the petitioners' concerns about the plight of child soldiers in Uganda, Sudan, Somalia and Algeria, and is committed to promoting and protecting children's rights through international forums such as the United Nations. Australia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Convention), and its two Optional Protocols, as well as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. These treaties have benefited children by establishing standards against which international behaviour can be measured and scrutinised.

Australia continues actively to encourage all States to commit to children's rights and to ratify the Convention and its Optional Protocols. Most recently, Australia co-sponsored resolutions on the rights of the child at the seventh session of the Human Rights Council, in March 2008, and at the United Nations General Assembly, in December 2007. On 12 February 2008, Australia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Ambassador Robert Hill, delivered a strong country statement indicating broad support for the United Nations Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict, at a United Nations Security Council open debate. In his statement, Ambassador Hill encouraged Member States that had not yet done so to ratify both the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute, without delay.

Australia's international development program (managed through the Australian Agency for International Development) supports a number of programs to mitigate the impact of conflict on children, and these practical efforts complement our advocacy work in the United Nations. For example, Australia provides aid to Uganda - one of nine African countries targeted for Australian assistance - to help ease the burden of conflict and to mitigate its appalling effects on civilians. The over AUD\$6 million of Australian aid provided to Uganda in 2006-07 included AUD\$1.5 million funding for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for the protection of women and children displaced by conflict and to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in northern Uganda.

In addition to the work being undertaken in Uganda, Australia also actively funds programs to counter the problem of child soldiers in the Asia-Pacific region. Current programs are active in the Philippines (through UNICEF), East Timor, and Nepal.

We will continue to look for opportunities to counter the use of child soldiers in Uganda, Sudan, Somalia and Algeria.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Smith