

406-691



THE HON KEVIN RUDD MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
CANBERRA



19 APR 2011

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr ~~Murphy~~ *Murphy*



I refer to your letter of 16 March 2011 conveying a petition submitted to the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding apostasy laws.

The Australian Government shares the view that persons of any religion or belief should be able to choose freely to follow a new religion or belief, without prejudice. As the petition notes, the right to freedom of religion is established in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes the freedom to change one's religion or belief.

Australia continues to work multilaterally, regionally and bilaterally to promote the right to freedom of religion or belief. Australia co-sponsors the United Nations General Assembly's resolution on the 'Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief'. This resolution urges states to "ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief to all without distinction, inter alia, by the provision of access to justice and effective remedies in cases where the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, or the right to freely practice one's religion, including the right to change one's religion or belief, is violated".

Australia also strongly supports the mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur identifies existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and presents recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles.

The Australian Government makes regular human rights representations to countries that place restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief or impose the death penalty or other sanctions on the exercise of this right.

Australia also has a long-standing opposition to capital punishment. The Government continues to pursue actively the abolition of the death penalty both in our region and around the world. We work through our overseas missions and in multilateral fora to urge countries to cease executions, establish a moratorium on capital punishment or remove the death penalty from their law, depending on domestic circumstances.

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

Yours sincerely

Kevin Rudd