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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PETITIONS

OFFICE OF THE
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

23 APR 2008

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

Dear Madam Chair

Thank you for your letter dated 17 March 2008 to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Stephen Smith MP, enclosing a petition to the House of Representatives about the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. The Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.


Australia is a strong advocate for human rights and raises human rights issues both bilaterally and through international organisations. The Australian Government works with the international community to encourage Bangladesh to observe internationally accepted standards of human rights. Consistent with this approach, the Australian Government regularly raises such issues with the Government of Bangladesh, through the Australian High Commission in Dhaka.

To encourage a more comprehensive approach to human rights in Bangladesh, officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Attorney-General's Department recently hosted a delegation from the Bangladesh's Law and Justice Ministry to advise on the creation of a national human rights institution in Bangladesh. DFAT has also met representatives of the Bangladesh community in Australia to discuss human rights issues of concern in Bangladesh.

In the case of the events referred to in the petition, the Australian Government considers such matters should be dealt with by the Government of Bangladesh and notes that Bangladesh's Foreign Adviser, Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, has recently raised this issue with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

I should be grateful if you would inform the petitioners accordingly.

Yours sincerely

 Kate Callaghan
A/g Chief of Staff