

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

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Minister for International Development & the
Pacific
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Dear Senator Seselja

RE: CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR APPOINTMENT AS MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE PACIFIC

I am writing on behalf of the more than 500,000 Amnesty International Australia supporters to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of more than 10 million people that promotes and defends all human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. In Australia, we work with governments and relevant ministers to further this work - there are two key issues that I would like to raise with you in your new role.

COVID-19 Vaccines for the Pacific

With promising results from various COVID-19 vaccine trials, including the roll-out of vaccines in some areas, we are finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. I understand that the government is now planning for how the vaccines will be rolled out locally, but it is also important to take stock of the situation globally.

The Australian government has ordered 53.8 million doses from Oxford/AstraZeneca, 51 million doses of the Novavax vaccine, and 10 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. **Does Australia need 114.8 million doses for a population of 25 million people?** This equates to more than 4.5 doses per person. It is projected that most of the vaccines will require two doses.

A group of UN human rights experts has recently called on governments to stop hoarding vaccine supplies, and on pharmaceutical companies to share their innovations to ensure everyone can access tests, treatments and vaccines for COVID-19. Australia has been proactively blocking World Trade Organisation efforts to facilitate technology transfers so that COVID-19 medical products including vaccines could be produced quickly and affordably by manufacturers around the world.

On 5 November 2020, Health Minister Greg Hunt issued a media release that stated that the government has made agreements to donate vaccine doses to partners in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. However, he also said that the doses would be only donated if there are any “available above domestic need”. Whilst it is expected that Australia will have extra doses available, our partners in the Pacific need certainty on this very important matter.

I urge you to raise the matter of providing the Pacific with COVID-19 vaccine doses with Minister Hunt as a matter of urgency. Your government should:

- Outline how many ordered vaccine doses are required for use in Australia, and explicitly state how many vaccine doses are likely required and that will be made available to partners in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and
- Depending on the figure of vaccine doses that will be available to partners, purchase or produce additional vaccine doses to ensure that Australia is contributing towards universal access.

Death Penalty

Under *Australia’s Strategy for Abolition of the Death Penalty*, Australia formally ‘opposes the death penalty in all circumstances for all people’ and actively advocates for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide, including preventing ‘the reintroduction of the death penalty where it has been abolished’ or ‘the resumption of executions where a moratorium has been in place’.

In the Pacific, Tonga and Papua New Guinea are abolitionist in practice, but the death penalty remains in their laws. The last known execution to take place in the Pacific region was in 1982 in Tonga. In recent years, with the exception of eight reported but unconfirmed death sentences in Papua New Guinea since 2009, Amnesty International has not recorded executions or death sentences in the Pacific region.

The only Pacific countries that have signed on to the *Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* - which pertains to the abolition of the death penalty - are Australia and New Zealand.

In your new ministerial role, I urge you to pursue a death penalty-free Pacific. I am sure there will be opportunities through both bi-lateral and multi-lateral fora for you to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty across the region. I also offer Amnesty International’s expertise in any way that we can assist.

We are keen to work with your government on the matters of universal access to COVID-19 vaccines and the death penalty, as well as other human rights issues that arise across the Pacific. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these important issues.

For further information and to organise a meeting, please contact Joel MacKay at joel.mackay@amnesty.org.au or 0424 242 112.

Yours sincerely,

Tim O'Connor
Impact Manager
Amnesty International Australia