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## The Presbyterian Church of Queensland

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2 May 2014

The Hon Tony Abbott MP  
Prime Minister  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

We write to express our deep concern about the plight of oppressed peoples around the world – especially those persecuted on the basis of religious conviction, ethnicity, or gender.

We are especially concerned about the persecution of Christians in China, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia (including West Papua), Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, The Sudan and Zimbabwe. We recognize that many of these countries do not enjoy the same freedoms we do – not only in freedom to participate in a liberal democracy (such as freedom of association) but also in freedom to worship Jesus. We also believe there is a significant international impact from the systematic or ad hoc persecution of Christians in these nations. Such persecution results in people fleeing their homes, adding to the already significant global refugee crisis. We believe this humanitarian crisis is, in part, the result of the ongoing abuse of Christians in such countries so Australia has a significant interest in addressing and preventing persecution and oppression through our contributions on the international stage.

We write not only to continue to draw this situation to your attention, but also to seek assurances that the Australian Government will continue to be mindful of the plight of oppressed people groups persecuted on the basis of religious conviction, ethnicity, or gender when setting foreign policy and to take all appropriate action, either through our diplomatic relationships in the United Nations, or directly.

Christians in these countries will not always speak up for themselves and may not ask for our help, because Christians follow the example of Lord Jesus, who laid down His life in an

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extreme act of persecution from the government of his day. But we believe we must speak up – in the spirit of familial love for our fellow humans, and fellow Christians, and because the Gospel of Jesus is good news that has the capacity to end oppression.

The Apostle Paul is a famous example of a persecutor of other people – specifically Christians - who had his life transformed by this message. Jesus himself, in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke's Gospel, said that the proclamation of his place as king of the world would have this effect:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

We believe oppression can only truly end, both for individuals who suffer, and in nations where oppression occurs, when people accept God's offer of reconciliation, made through Jesus at the Cross. At the Cross Jesus freely offers people a way back to a relationship with their Creator. Physical oppression of others by those in power in these nations is a symptom of humanity's rejection of this relationship.

We believe freedom to practice religion, and freedom for believers to share their faith with others, is vital for the ongoing development of many of these countries. Research by sociologist, Robert Woodberry, shows that the spread of Christianity in developing countries provides a platform for economic development. The significant finding from his many years of study was that:

*"Areas where Protestant missionaries had a significant presence in the past are on average more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, higher educational attainment (especially for women), and more robust membership in nongovernmental associations."*

The Christian message, which promotes the sacrificial love modelled by Jesus at the Cross to restore broken relationships – especially our relationship with God, but also our relationships with one another – is a message of hope that transforms lives and has the capacity to play a vital role in transforming these nations.

We recognise that foreign policy is complex and that many of these nations are not trading partners or are rogue states. We therefore also recognise that in many ways your hands are tied, and this global situation makes us all the more thankful to God for the peace and freedom we enjoy in our country. We are so thankful that both the Government and the Opposition are committed to maintaining this freedom in Australia. We thank you for your

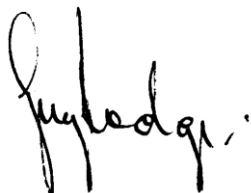
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good governance and care for all men and women and children in this nation, regardless of religious conviction, ethnicity, or gender.

You remain in our prayers as you make significant decisions about our country's future that help shape lives both here and abroad. Please let us know if there are other ways we might ask our people to pray for you as you lead us, this is part of our responsibility as the church, as Paul says to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:1-4):

*"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

In Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Rodgers'.

Hon Greg Rodgers  
Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Queensland

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ron Clark'.

(Rev) Ron Clark  
Clerk of Assembly, Presbyterian Church of Queensland

- cc The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Leader of the Opposition
- cc The Hon Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs
- cc The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs