



Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department

MCI6-000125

02 February 2016

Ms Geraldine Kearney
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutions NSW
PO Box 259
ROSEBERY NSW 1445

Dear Ms Kearney

Thank you for your letter dated 23 November 2015 to the Prime Minister, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, regarding Australia's counter-terrorism legislation. Your letter has been referred to the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC, who has asked me to respond on his behalf.

The Government's highest priority is to keep the community safe. Australia has strong national security and counter terrorism laws, which were strengthened in 2014 and 2015 to ensure law enforcement and intelligence agencies have the powers they need to prevent and disrupt domestic security threats.

The Government announced in early 2015 that it would develop amendments to the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* (Citizenship Act) to provide for the cessation of Australian citizenship in the case of dual nationals engaged in terrorism-related conduct. On 24 June 2015 the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon Peter Dutton MP, introduced the *Australian Citizenship Amendment (Allegiance to Australia) Act* (Allegiance Act). The amendments made by the Allegiance Act, which commenced operation on 12 December 2015, expand the grounds on which a person's Australian citizenship can be renounced or revoked for terrorism-related conduct or convictions.

Australian citizenship is a common bond, involving reciprocal rights and obligations. Through certain conduct incompatible with the shared values of the Australian community, some individuals may demonstrate that they have severed that bond and repudiated their allegiance to Australia. Supporting or engaging in terrorist activities against Australia's interests is a breach of a person's commitment and allegiance to our country, a bond that should unite all citizens.

Neither the Government nor these amendments target particular religious or ethnic groups within our community. Australia's ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is a source of social and economic strength, and is a key part of Australian life. Australia's counter terrorism laws and operational arrangements are aimed at countering the threat of terrorism and protecting our tolerant and multicultural Australian community, not dividing it.

If you have any further queries about the Citizenship Act, including the recently enacted amendments, you may wish to contact the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, who administers the legislation, or his Department.

Thank you again for writing on these matters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cameron Gifford', written in a cursive style.

Cameron Gifford
Assistant Secretary
Counter-Terrorism Branch