

## **Liberty Victoria Calls for Reversal of Cuts to Australians Coming Home and for Responsible Family Reunification**

Liberty Victoria condemns the Federal Government's decision to further [cut arrivals to Australia](#). This was [called for by the Victorian Government](#), amongst others. This is a breach of human rights which will exacerbate the suffering for people who have already been separated from their families for too long.

Whilst at Liberty Victoria we have supported [some restrictions to our human rights based on expert public health advice during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), the time has now come to ensure that:

- (1) All Australians abroad have a clear pathway to return;
- (2) Australian citizens and permanent residents are allowed to visit family members abroad; and
- (3) Immediate family members are allowed to visit family members in Australia.

The Federal Government has had over 18 months to make such arrangements. It is incredible that some front-line workers remain unvaccinated, and that [drivers for arrivals have not been required to wear masks](#). These are simple measures that would help to protect our safety.

From our experience with the Victorian lockdowns, we know how difficult isolation and separation from loved ones can be. That was for a few months. Many people have now not seen immediate family members for over two years. This comes at a significant cost to their mental and emotional health. It means that family members have not been able to be present, for example, to care for [loved ones suffering from terminal illness](#). This has been found, by the United Nations Human Rights Committee in an interim decision, to breach our obligations under international human rights law.

It is extraordinary and deeply troubling that the Australian Government is expending resources challenging a decision of the United Nations Human Rights Committee rather than using its resources to forge pathways for reunification. The Government should increase the

number of repatriation flights rather than force people to pay for [astronomically expensive business class flights](#), which of course many cannot afford.

Australia is a vibrant multicultural society, but we are now treating Australian citizens living abroad and those onshore with immediate family overseas as [second-class citizens](#). This comes at a great cost to our social fabric. It is harming [our international reputation](#). While it appears that some people are willing to support 'Fortress Australia' at all costs, and there is arguably a short-term political advantage for politicians in advocating for border closures, we have a moral responsibility to care for our citizens abroad and to promote the well-being of those with family abroad who have made Australia their home.

Australia is a co-drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both instruments protect the rights of citizens to return to their country of origin and to engage in family life. While some limitations to those rights are understandable in the context of a global pandemic, we have now reached the point where such limitations are clearly disproportionate and unreasonable. Just as we have a moral duty to bring our citizens home, we have a moral duty to promote responsible family reunification.

The failure of the Government to protect the human rights of Australian citizens and permanent residents demonstrates, yet again, the great weakness of Australia being the only developed Western nation without a national human rights instrument to ensure that human rights are protected and advanced, and to hold our Government to account.

The rest of the world is opening up, and we cannot remain a hermit republic. The Government must act in accordance with its responsibilities to its citizens and in accordance with its obligations under international human rights law.

***Quotes attributable to Julia Kretzenbacher, President, Liberty Victoria***

*"It is simply not good enough that 18 months into a pandemic we are taking backwards steps and locking out Australians, rather than putting in place measures that will protect us, such as requiring staff working with international arrivals to be vaccinated and wear masks."*

*“Australian citizens and permanent residents have a right to return home. We should stop treating those that live overseas or who have family overseas as second-class citizens. The current policy has made a pathway home unaffordable and unattainable due to the price gouging of some airlines. The Federal, State and Territory Governments need to do more to ensure the vaccine rollout is ramped up, increase the number of repatriation flights and let those who are fully vaccinated isolate at home instead of hotels.”*

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