

## Law Council gravely concerned by sentencing of Australian woman to death in Vietnam

On behalf of the Australian legal profession, the Law Council of Australia has expressed its grave concern that a 73-year-old Australian woman, Nguyen Thi Huong, has been sentenced to death in Vietnam for drug trafficking.

The Law Council has a long-standing policy opposing the imposition or execution of the death penalty in Australia and throughout the world.

Law Council of Australia President, Stuart Clark AM, said while Vietnam's laws and sovereignty were to be respected, use of the death penalty was always to be condemned.

"The death penalty is a breach of the most fundamental human right: the right to life," Mr Clark said.

"It is the position of the Law Council that no person should be subjected to the death penalty irrespective of their nationality, the nature of the crime they are alleged to have committed, or the time and place of a crime's alleged commission.

"Overwhelmingly, nations are recognising that a sentence of imprisonment is a proportionate response to drug importation and trafficking. There is no evidence that the death penalty is more effective at deterring drug crime — or any other crime — than a prison term.

"The Law Council commends the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in offering consular assistance and support to Ms Nguyen Thi Huong and her family."

Mr Clark said the Law Council had noted that Vietnam had made positive steps toward winding back the use of the death penalty in recent years, including abolishing capital punishment for a range of crimes including robbery, drug possession, and opposing order. However, he stressed the importance of continued regional engagement to abolish the death penalty.

"The case highlights the importance of Australia developing, funding and implementing a whole-of-government Strategy for the Abolition of the Death Penalty – with a focus on countries in the Indo-Pacific," Mr Clark said.

"The Law Council encourages the prompt development of the Strategy and would be pleased to continue to liaise with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on this issue.

"The development of such a Strategy would be consistent with the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's recommendation on 5 May 2016."

A copy of the [Law Council's Death Penalty Policy Statement](#) is available online.

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