

[Letter to an opposition MP]

[your address]

[date]

[Mr/Ms xx] MP
Member for xx
[address]

Dear [Mr/Ms xx],

Re.: The Opposition's position on the situation in Ukraine

I am writing as your constituent, requesting that you urge your colleagues and the Opposition at large condemn the escalating abuse of human rights in Ukraine.

In November last year, demonstrators protesting against the Ukrainian government's decision to discontinue preparations for signing an Association Agreement with the European Union were violently attacked by riot police. These actions gave rise to two months of almost entirely peaceful protest by hundreds of thousands of people in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. The protests soon went beyond EU issues to become expressions of a rejection by the people of Ukraine of the escalating authoritarianism and corruption of their government.

On 16 January this year the Ukrainian parliament passed laws drastically curtailing freedom of speech and association. The legislation made almost any expression of protest against the authorities illegal and punishable by long prison sentences. The introduction of these laws sparked the violence resulting in the deaths and injury of many protesters. The recent repeal of the laws is a first step toward normalisation of the situation.

The threat to human rights in Ukraine, however, remains serious. There is a continuing need for international pressure on Ukrainian authorities. The Australian Government has so far issued one public statement of its position concerning the Ukrainian situation (in mid-December) and has, more recently, communicated its concerns to the Embassy of Ukraine in Australia.

The seriousness of the situation calls for much firmer actions on the Government's part. The Opposition should urge the Australian Government to demand the immediate release of protesters arrested for exercising their right to voice their opinion, as well as the withdrawal from the streets of Ukrainian cities of the special police units known as "Berkut."

The Government should introduce personal sanctions against members of the regime in Ukraine who have authorised the use of violence against peaceful protesters or failed to observe human rights standards, restricting their right to travel to Australia and their ability to undertake business activity or access any investments they may have in this country.

The Government should participate in international action, including the provision of observers and monitors, to ensure that undertakings by the Yanukovich regime are carried out. To help restore a peaceful and democratic order in Ukraine the Government should support early, free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in that country.

Yours sincerely,