

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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VANUATU MEDIA DIRECTOR BARRED FROM REUNITING WITH HIS FAMILY

Last week, the Vanuatu government cancelled the residency visa and refused to renew a work permit for Dan McGarry, media director of the *Daily Post*. On Saturday 16 November 2019, McGarry was refused permission to board a plane in Brisbane, where he had been attending a conference, in order to return to his family in Vanuatu.

The *Daily Post* is Vanuatu's only daily newspaper. The Media Association of Vanuatu has called on the Vanuatu government to reconsider its decision to cancel McGarry's visa and work permit and has noted that these actions have had an unprecedented and chilling impact on media freedom in the country. Amnesty International echoes these concerns.

McGarry believes that the government's refusal to renew his work permit and its cancellation of his residency was in direct response to a series of articles published in the *Daily Post* describing China's growing influence in the country.

McGarry, a Canadian citizen who has lived and worked in Vanuatu for 16 years, was in the process of applying for permanent residency in Vanuatu when his visa was cancelled. McGarry's partner and two children remain in Vanuatu. He had planned to return on a visitor (non-working) visa to see his family while the cancellation of his work permit was being appealed, but he was turned away by the airline, reportedly on instructions from the Vanuatu government.

Vanuatu has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression (Article 19). In addition, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (to which Vanuatu is also a state party) provides that applications for entry into a state for the purpose of family reunification should be dealt with in a positive, humane, and expeditious manner, with no adverse consequences for the family (Article 10). At a minimum, McGarry should be permitted to return to his family in Vanuatu whilst the denial of his work permit is appealed before an independent and impartial court of law.

Amnesty International calls on the government of Vanuatu to uphold the right to freedom of expression and media freedom in the country, which includes the freedom to criticize government policies and actions without fear of reprisals. Journalists and media workers should not be punished or otherwise intimidated solely for peacefully expressing their opinions.

Pursuant to its international obligations including under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the government of Vanuatu must also ensure that Mr McGarry can be immediately reunited with his family in Vanuatu.

Such brazen attacks on the media, while rare in Vanuatu, are not uncommon in other Pacific Island countries. In the years following the 2006 military coup in Fiji, a number of senior journalists were deported or removed from the country, faced arbitrary arrest or detention, or court proceedings solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. On 30 November 2019, two Australian journalists were deported from Kiribati for trying to report on the country's diplomatic ties to China.