

This is a scanned copy of the text of an original letter on the Minister's letterhead

THE HON ALEXANDER DOWNER MP
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA ACT 2600

Mr John Russell
Managing Director
Shandwick International
Avenue de Tervuren 12 bte. 11
Brussels - 1040
BELGIUM

17 FEB 2000

Dear Mr Russell

Thank you for your letter dated 2 February 2000 concerning Australians living in Belgium requesting that the Australian Government seek negotiations with the Belgium Government in order to conclude bilateral social security and health agreements.

The Government is concerned to ensure that Australians pursuing work opportunities overseas are not disadvantaged. I can understand the difficulties caused by the lack of reciprocal health and social security agreements with Belgium, and found it helpful to have the opportunity to hear your concerns first-hand during my recent visit to Brussels. I have instructed the Australian Ambassador in Brussels to pursue the issue of negotiating reciprocal health and social security agreements with the Belgium Government and seek advice on their position. We hope for a positive response from the Belgium Government, so that our officials can get down to the detailed negotiations, which will take time but are obviously worth pursuing.

I welcome any assistance that the Australian community in Belgium can provide to encourage a positive approach by the Belgian Government.

Thank you for bringing your views to the attention of the Government.

Yours sincerely

Alexander Downer