To the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme

8/04/2020

Dear committee members,

I hereby wish to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme for the Inquiry - Implementation of the National Redress Scheme.

Regarding Case Study 21 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

In 2014–15, Case Study 21 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse made findings regarding child sexual abuse by the leaders of Satyananda Yoga during the 1970s and 1980s at the Satyananda Yoga Ashram (now called the Academy of Yoga Science) at Mangrove Mountain, New South Wales (NSW), Australia.

The current leaders of Satyananda Yoga and the Academy of Yoga Science have been damagingly negligent in responding fully to the Commission's findings, leaving survivors and community members feeling betrayed by the lack of resolution.

The Royal Commission findings regarding case 21 concluded that: Satyananda Saraswati, the founding guru of Satyananda Yoga, and head of Satyananda Yoga worldwide, had overarching authority at the Mangrove Mountain Ashram (and its centres). The current head (based in India) has not addressed the matters raised by the Royal Commission. Instead, he has severed all ties with the Australian satellite of his international yoga organisation.

I'm writing to you as a yoga practitioner and former Swami of Satyananda Yoga - 1983 - 1990. I am extremely concerned that the Academy of Yoga Science, formerly Satyananda Yoga, have so far failed to sign up to the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse Redress Scheme. In addition they have failed to respond to community concerns and questions, including two emails from myself, inquiring as to whether they intend to sign up to the redress scheme.

The Academy of Yoga Science has paid some compensation to those who testified at the Royal Commission, however there may be others in our yoga community that have not yet come forward. Survivors of sexual abuse, especially children, often do not report the assault for years, sometimes decades, after the event. It is for this reason that the Australian government set up the National Redress Scheme, to offer support and redress to those who may not have yet come forward.

The Academy of Yoga Science are a registered Australian charity, and as such have a responsibility to be open and transparent about their ethical and financial dealings.

It is my firm and committed belief that the Academy of Yoga Science should join the redress scheme. If they will not respond to requests from the community, I ask that the Committee investigating implementation of the redress scheme take action to enquire as to why they will not join the redress scheme, and why they are ignoring questions from members of the yoga Community.

Furthermore: as a person who dedicated seven years of my life to building the organisation that was Satyananda Ashram and that is now known as the Academy of Yoga Science, I would like to see the money that came from the sale of Mangrove Mountain Ashram put towards a fund to help the survivors of sexual, psychological and physical abuse suffered in the ashram.

Mangrove Mountain Ashram was built on the suffering of children, and the abuse of power by those in charge. In my view it is not ethical to make profits out of that suffering. Wherever the Academy of Yoga Science moves with the profits of Satyananda Ashram, they will be followed by that stain of suffering. Better to join the redress scheme and offer whatever is left from Mangrove Ashram to help the survivors.

Childhood sexual abuse destroys the lives of abused children forever. I was taught that to practice yoga is to do good and be good. The Academy of Yoga Science needs to act from a place of love and goodness, and honour the survivors of Mangrove by joining the redress scheme.

Sincerely

Anandashila Saraswati