

Religious Freedom in Australia

A submission to the *Inquiry into the status of the human right to freedom of religion or belief*
1 February, 2017

There are clear identifiable breaches and threats to freedom of religion in Australia.

Definition of religion:

An analysis of the many definitions of religion reveals one underlying common element which is: Religion is a worldview that explains origins, purpose and destiny. It must be noted that atheism fits the definition of religion.

Religious Freedom principle:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."

-UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18, 1948

Current breaches and threats to the Religious Freedom principle in Australia:

- Failure to stand up to derision of a particular religion.
There are strong anti-Christian undercurrents in mainstream Media including in State owned media providers that are not being checked. The open contempt against Christianity is also manifest at non-faith based academic institutions.
- Suppressing freedom of speech.
This comes in the form of denying the freedom of respectfully discussing the reasons why one does not adhere to a particular religion.
- In denying the freedom of choice to faith-based organisations.
This comes in the form of forcing faith based schools or organisations to hire staff that do not adhere to the religious principles of that school or organisation.
- In legislating that a particular religion is taught at non-faith based schools.
This comes in the form of set curriculums that promote one particular religion (atheism) at the exclusion of other religions.
- In legislating that people perform acts that are against their conscience.
This comes in the form of forcing doctors to refer abortions to ones that will perform it, enforcing the promotion of a particular gender theory, forcing people to provide products or services that promote lifestyles they disagree with. The State cannot ignore that such matters are deeply rooted matters of conscience.
N.B. Discrimination against LGBT persons is different to not wanting to promote such lifestyles. One must respect the human dignity of an LGBT person even if one does not want to provide services for the union/marriage of such persons. It is similar to one refusing to provide services that promote a religion other than their own. These matters are and will always be matters of conscience no matter how much we desire them not to be. Where matters of conscience clash with discrimination, freedom of conscience must come first. If it does not, then there is no religious freedom as anything can be classified as discriminatory.