



Opening Comments to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights on the *Religious Discrimination Bill 2021*, the *Religious Discrimination (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2021* and the *Human Rights Legislation Amendment Bill 2021*

12 January 2022

Advocacy for Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience is central to the SDA world view and is based on our fundamental beliefs. SDA believes in advocating for the freedom of religion of people of all faiths and those of none.

Currently there are very limited protection at Australian Federal Law for the protection of individuals who are discriminated against on the basis of their religious belief, and currently the various states and territories have a patchwork of protections and notably, NSW and South Australia have none. This is in contrast to the federal legislative frameworks that protect against discrimination on the basis of other attributes such as race, sex, age and disability.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia (SDA) desires to see that Australia continues to be a diverse and tolerant modern pluralistic society where fundamental human rights are appropriately balanced, with no one right dominating another right. Therefore, it is important that the fundamental human rights of Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as articulated in ICCPR Article 18, are incorporated as protected attributes in Australian law.

SDA supports the recommendations of the Religious Freedom Review Expert Panel's recommendation 15 to enact a Religious Discrimination Act and supports the Federal Government's commitment to incorporate ICCPR Article 18, into the Australian legal framework. It is noted that the UN Human Rights Committee has observed that "*not every differentiation of treatment will constitute discrimination, if the criteria for such differentiation are reasonable and objective and if the aim is to achieve a purpose which is legitimate under the Covenant*".

The various ministries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including health-care, aged-care, charities, and education, all operate in a competitive environment. As such, when Australians are choosing to engage with our various service providers, it is reasonable for them to expect that the staff will uphold the values and ethos of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the delivery of the service. To maintain our beliefs, teachings and ethos, it is essential that the ability to prefer the employment of members of our faith community who believe and practice the teachings of the church. This same right is afforded to many organisations and we respectfully submit that it should be afforded to faith based organisations.

Therefore, SDA supports the passage of the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 and related bills.

Pastor Michael Worker

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