



MUSLIM WOMEN'S NATIONAL NETWORK OF AUSTRALIA INC.

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Mr Peter Hallahan
Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Room S1.61, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

18 April 2003



Dear Mr Hallahan

Proposed changes to HREOC

The Muslim Women's National Network of Australia wishes to express its concerns concerning the changes to HREOC which are currently being proposed by the Australian government.

A major concern to us is the proposal that HREOC will no longer be able to intervene in court cases which raise human rights concerns without the permission of the Attorney-General. Unfortunately, history has proven that there are circumstances from time to time, when the government of the day, of whatever political persuasion, cannot be relied on to act in accordance with human rights.

Those affected in these circumstances are most often the powerless, individuals or minority groups who do not have the resources or backing to defend their rights in the courts. In these circumstances, it is vital that an independent body such as HREOC, has the ability to intervene, even against the government. To remove this power from HREOC is a seriously backward step in protecting human rights in Australia.

Secondly, MWNA is concerned at the proposal to abolish the specialist commissioners to replace them with generalist Human Rights Commissioners. We feel that there is greater merit in allowing individual commissioners for specific function to build up their expertise in these areas. Generalist commissioners may be diverted by competing demands from being able to devote sufficient time and resources to specific areas of need.

At the present time, the prevalence of racism in the Australian community is a matter of great concern and we believe that the interests of aboriginal and ethnic minority groups are best looked after by the retention of the post of Race Discrimination commissioner, and the interests of women are best served by the retention of the Sex Discrimination commissioner.

Yours faithfully

Muslim Women's National Network of Australia

Per Jamila Hussain (Acting secretary)

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