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## Press Release re Religious Freedom 2.12.18



Norman Miller with Freedom Hand

Co-founders of the Centre for International Reconciliation and Peace, Pastors Norman and Barbara Miller, said in Cairns today that they believe the nation is going down a dangerous road in robbing religious schools of the minimal protection they have by removing exemptions to the Sex Discrimination Act.

“It is alarming that Labor’s bill before Parliament in this last sitting week of 2018 goes further than removing exemptions for faith-based education institutions and pulls back the exemption that applies to all other religious institutions so that they must abide by the Sex Discrimination Act whenever they provide education whether it is in a Sunday sermon or a mid-week Bible study or youth meeting etc.,” said Mrs Miller.

She said, “Mark Fowler of Notre Dame Law School says in *The Weekend Australian* that the European Commission of Human Rights has not only recognised private religious schools as a human right but criticised the respondent government for presuming the state could dictate that children be ‘led to think only in the directions that are decided by the political majority of the parliament’.”

“Labor’s Bill would also require courts to determine whether aspects of religious education were ‘reasonable.’ What has happened to the separation between church and state that we are supposed to have when the state can dictate what is taught in religious institutions?” asked Miller.

“As a number of churches including the Catholic church have maintained, the current exemptions have not been used to expel students on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. However, removing them would deal a blow to the ability of Christian schools to teach a biblical view of marriage,” said Miller.

“One million Australians in religious schools are having their rights trampled on so Labor can do some virtue signalling on gay rights though they were the ones who extended these exemptions in the first place,” she said.

“The real debate is not about protecting gay students as there is bipartisan and community agreement about that. The real debate is that religious institutions providing education, in the narrow or broad sense, will have no protection against frivolous or activist litigation,” said Miller. “There will be unintended consequences providing a legal minefield.”

“It looks like the intention of Labor is to destroy the character of religious schools by not allowing them to be shaped by their beliefs and culture and making them clones of public schools,” said Miller.

“We need to keep the current exemptions in place until a Religious Freedom Act is enacted to recognise religious freedom in Australia as the international right it already is. It cannot be dealt with as exemptions from other legislation but needs to be recognised in its own right,” said Miller.

“We do not want religion driven from the public square. Faith-based schools should be able to function according to their teachings because that is why they exist and that is why parents send their children there,” said Miller.

“However, we are not just looking at religious freedom, but freedom of belief, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech and parental rights,” said the Millers. Norman Miller has painted a large yellow hand with FREEDOM printed large in the centre and the various freedoms printed on each finger and the thumb. He has taken part in processions in Cairns carrying this hand as a protest and will continue to do so.

“We urge all sections of the church to not be silent in this debate but to stand up for your beliefs and we urge people who aren’t part of faith groups to stand up for your values and your right to freedom of speech and conscience,” said the Millers.

“The Ruddock review was delivered to the government in May after thousands of submissions so it’s time to respond to it and implement any worthy recommendations.”

“People seem to forget that freedom of religion is internationally recognised as a human right. With the increase in secularism, this right needs to be protected. A framework needs to be worked out to deal with competing rights,” said the Millers.

Signed:

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