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THE ELECTORAL FUNDING AND DISCLOSURE BILL THREATENS OUR LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Caritas Australia is deeply concerned that the Federal Government's Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform Bill will undermine our democracy and stifle the voice of civil society. Caritas is calling for the Bill to be substantially amended.

The Bill would place an onerous burden of costly red tape on charities who contribute to public debate issues, and on their donors.

Caritas Australia CEO, Paul O'Callaghan says "the Bill would undermine the capacity for registered charities to inform public debate on issues which are important to Australians, and to ensure that the voice of the poor and marginalised are heard."

"Since Federation in 1901, Australia has been one of a relatively few countries to allow free speech and the quality of our public policy has benefitted as a result."

Caritas Australia is the international aid and development agency of the Catholic Church. The agency has a 50 year history of supporting marginalised communities throughout the Pacific, Asia, Africa, Latin America and with Australia's First Peoples. The Bill would force Caritas to be classed as a "political campaigner" simply for offering views throughout the annual cycle on a range of social justice issues.

This would also place a large administrative burden on the agency and require donors to become involved in unnecessary administrative processes. People who donate the equivalent of \$5 per week or more would be required to sign a statutory declaration, demonstrating their status as Australian citizens or residents.

Mr O'Callaghan says "there is no doubt this would turn off many of our donors, which would prevent Caritas from providing life- saving support to communities in need throughout the world."

"As just one example, Caritas supports thousands of women in Bangladesh to give birth in a safe environment with good quality medical and support services. This is just one project among hundreds that would be put at risk if the Bill was to pass."

Caritas Media contact: Nicole Clements on 0408 869 833 or email nicolec@caritas.org.au.