

# MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 21 September 2018

## **JOINT PRESS RELEASE BY ORGANISATIONS (LISTED BELOW) REGARDING THE REPORTABLE CONDUCT SCHEME**

On 12 September 2018, a large gathering of representatives from 20 faith-based organisations and major survivor advocate groups met together in the NSW Parliament House. Their aim was to establish a joint standing committee for the purpose of working together to tackle child abuse within religious settings. The original vision behind the establishment of the committee came from the NSW Ombudsman's Office and the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian who invited the parties to meet together on this historic occasion.

*'It is momentous for survivor advocate groups and faith based-organisations to join together to work to keep children safer in faith-based organisations and to respond more effectively and compassionately to survivors',* said Anne Walker, National Executive Director of Catholic Religious Australia. In the lead up to this event, the office of the NSW Ombudsman undertook surveys and related research to enable the group to identify nine key priorities that need to be addressed in order to safeguard children in religious settings and to work with survivors more responsively and compassionately. On the day, specific strategies were also identified so that joint work could be taken on strengthening faith organisations' child safeguarding frameworks and practices.

Representatives at the gathering also identified the need for action by the NSW Government. In 2016, Catholic and Anglican dioceses across NSW called for an expansion of the NSW Ombudsman's oversight of institutional abuse allegations to include all faith-based organisations.

This call was supported by the Royal Commission in its final report handed down last year. In May of this year, survivor groups together with many faith-based organisations, called upon the Government to take steps to implement this recommendation - in total, 35 parties called upon the NSW Government to take this action. In supporting this call, Hetty Johnson AM, founder and executive chair of Bravehearts said *'Let us hope that this will bring about the consistent and mandatory prioritisation of child safety that our children deserve'*. Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta and Chair of the NSW/ACT Catholic Bishops (Professional Standards) said, *'The Reportable Conduct Scheme has been a most significant factor in changing our response to allegations of child abuse. Independent oversight assists us all with accountability and transparency.'*

At this first survivor/faith-based standing committee meeting, representatives once again emphasised the critical need for support by an independent oversight body relating to the handling of child abuse cases. Bob Atkinson AO APM, former QLD Police Commissioner and Royal Commissioner, and Ken Moroney AO APM, former NSW Police Commissioner, also spoke of the critical need for independent oversight and support for faith-based organisations in helping them to meet the challenge of embedding child safe practice within their faith-based organisations.

Ken Moroney observed that: *'I have absolutely no doubt that faith-based leaders who were present at the standing committee wanted to deal effectively with any abuse of children in their gatherings. However, as someone who has faced the challenge of leading cultural reform within my own*

*organisation, I also have no doubt that strong, independent support and accountability will be essential to help leaders of faith achieve the changes which must be made to keep children safe.'*

Given what is at stake is the safety of children, the following organisations are now publicly calling upon the Government to take immediate steps to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations for expanding the reach of the reportable conduct scheme to include faith-based organisations:

- Blue Knot Foundation
- Bravehearts Foundation Ltd
- Survivors & Mates Support Network (SAMSN)
- Tzedek
- AdSAFE Ltd (Seventh-day Adventist Church South Pacific Division)
- Anglican Diocese of Armidale
- Anglican Diocese of Bathurst
- Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn
- Anglican Diocese of Grafton
- Anglican Diocese of Newcastle
- Anglican Diocese of Riverina
- Anglican Diocese of Sydney
- Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
- Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney
- Catholic Diocese of Armidale
- Catholic Diocese of Bathurst
- Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay
- Catholic Diocese of Lismore
- Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
- Catholic Diocese of Parramatta
- Catholic Diocese of Wagga Wagga
- Catholic Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes
- Catholic Diocese of Wollongong
- Catholic Professional Standards Limited
- Catholic Religious Australia
- Council of Social Service NSW
- Implementation Advisory Group for the Catholic Church
- Jewish House, Rabbinic Fellow and Great Synagogue, Sydney
- Ministry of Churches of Christ in NSW & ACT
- National Executive International Network of Churches
- Professional Standards Office of NSW and the ACT
- Uniting Church in Australia Synod of NSW and the ACT
- Safe Church Office of Hillsong Church
- Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory
- Seventh-day Adventist Church (Greater Sydney Conference) Limited
- Seventh-day Adventist Church (North New South Wales Conference) Limited

Key faith-based representatives acknowledged the wrongs of the past and re-confirmed that they wished to work with survivor groups and regulators to ensure that the past wrongs are not repeated.

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