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Subject:Submission to Enquiry into Child Abuse

Date:Thu, 23 Aug 2012 11:07:08 +1000

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To:fcde@parliament.vic.gov.au

Attention:

Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE, Victoria 3002

re: Victorian Government Inquiry into Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations Submission

I write in relation to the above Inquiry and wish to make the following submission.

As part of my submission, I attach articles from the mainstream Australian media & some other pertinent information including official court and Victoria Police records. I believe this information provides valuable appreciation of child sexual abuse within the Melbourne Jewish Community and in particular the Yeshivah Centre.

This attached information highlights the cover-ups by the leadership of the Yeshivah Centre; the Yeshivah Centre's decision not to report the matters to Victoria Police; the Yeshivah Centre's decision to continue to grant access to a known offender (David Cyprys) who had previously pleaded guilty to indecent assault in 1992 against a student at the Yeshivah College (see the attached extract of that matter) & continued to employ David Cyprys and grant him access to young children at the Yeshivah College till as recently as 2011; the Yeshivah Centre's failure to be honest and forth right with investigations by Victoria Police and statements under oath in court (refer to attached media articles highlighting court proceedings and matters concerning [REDACTED] whose integrity was brought into question by the presiding Magistrate in committal hearing of David Cyprys who is charged with in excess of 40 counts related to child sexual abuse, including incidents of rape, against students of the Yeshivah College)

I am a concerned member of the Melbourne Orthodox Jewish Community & a seat holder at the Yeshivah synagogue. I say seat holder at the Yeshivah because there is no membership. There are no elections, no democracy, no accountability or transparency in relation to its operations or decision making.

I am friends with a number of victims and families of victims of sexual abuse perpetrated within the Melbourne Jewish Community and in particular the Yeshivah Centre.

These events have only become known to me in recent years, and the knowledge of their occurrence has had a profound negative impact upon me. I was until recent times most friendly with much of the management and Rabbinate. When this tragic saga was revealed I was quite shaken not only by what had happened unbeknown to me, but more importantly

by the fact that it has been demonstrated that these tragic crimes were well known to my management and Rabbinat "friends", and they failed to act appropriately and morally to protect these children.

I have been shaken to my very core, by the nature of the crimes that these young children were subjected to over a period of decades, by known offenders, who operated freely within the confines of the Melbourne Jewish Community, in particular the Yeshivah Centre. I am still a seat holder but no longer a proud seat holder. I am still a seat holder because I believe you "have to be in it to change it" and thus am determined to ensure change, and the mantra "never again" is upheld.

Some of these offenders, including David Cyprys and David Kramer, both former employees of the Yeshivah Centre are the subject of current court proceedings, and as such it is not appropriate for me to make detailed statements in relation to the charges, including rape allegedly perpetrated by these individuals against children who they accessed and to whom they owed a duty of care, through the Yeshivah Centre.

The crimes themselves are horrific, and no child should ever be subjected to sexual abuse in any form. It is abhorrent, and must be condemned in all forms.

What made the situation even more tragic for me and for all who have come to learn of these crimes, is the fact that it has now been shown by press reporting and evidence sworn in court under oath, that the leadership of the Yeshivah Centre had knowledge of the offending at the time it was being perpetrated. The leadership at the Yeshivah Centre knew the names of these child victims. The leadership at the Yeshivah Centre knew the names of the perpetrators of these horrific sexual abuse crimes against children. The leadership at the Yeshivah Centre was provided details of the crimes, by both the parents, victims and others who were privy to such information. Yet, in spite of all this, the leadership at the Yeshivah Centre did NOT report the matters to police or relevant government agencies, and seemingly did nothing to protect these children. Further, as has been shown in the case of David Cyprys, these offenders were not curtailed in their access to children, and continued to sexually assault children, and even rape them.

The insensitivity of the management is most poignantly illustrated by the Yeshivah using Cyprys (the convicted offender) to stand guard on Holy Days, including Rosh Hashannah (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) outside the Yeshivah Synagogue where he offended. Previous hapless victims then had to be admitted to the Synagogue by their prior molester, who controlled access. This was the situation up until the police investigation starting last year.

These decades of systemic sexual abuse of children and cover-ups at the Yeshivah Centre have become public knowledge since the Victoria Police commenced its investigations into sexual abuse at the Yeshivah Centre; and the press began reporting these horrific cases of sexual abuse at the Yeshivah Centre and the associated failure by leadership at the Yeshivah Centre to protect the children; I have been privy to witness the dynamics of all this unfold at the Yeshivah Centre. It has not been a pretty sight.

I have been present, when the Rabbi of the Congregation, Rabbi [REDACTED] used his Saturday sermon on multiple occasions to publicly vilify and attack victims, their families and supporters for reporting the matter to police; government agencies and discussing the matters with the media. I have witnessed families being torn apart, and friendships destroyed, because there is a religious belief among some that the reporting done by these victims and their families is a grave sin, and they need to be punished and excommunicated accordingly.

Whilst publicly, the Rabbis say they deplore instances of sexual abuse against children, in reality, what they deplore even more, is the spotlight being shone upon the Jewish Community and its institutions; and most importantly the Rabbinat itself by external non-Jewish forces. To this end, anyone who has reported these crimes to the police, government agencies and/or discussed the matters with the media, has become a persona non grata within the community.

I ask, that in your inquiry, you pay due consideration to the power that religious institutions yield over victims and their families, particularly orthodox persons. For in my experience, the notion that a person who has committed an evil sin can and should be punished and excommunicated is a grave threat and concern to many victims, including those who have yet to muster the courage to make a statement to Police in relation to the sexual abuse they suffered at the Yeshivah Centre.

I also ask that the inquiry considers potential amendments to the Crimes Act that would make the use of religion to persuade victims and their families not to report crimes to the police, a criminal offence, punishable to a custodial sentence. Such an offence could be incorporated into the notion of intimidation of witnesses and/or families of victims.

In this manner, I believe the inquiry will discover and fully appreciate why sexual abuse has flourished and been under-reported in religious institutions, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The inquiry will surely reveal that a mechanism needs to be put in place to prevent persons who misuse religion to protect the offenders and institutions, rather than the children who suffered the sexual abuse and are the true victims of these crimes. This will ensure that the true culprits of child sexual abuse are brought to account – those culprits who misuse religion for their own purpose and/or self gratification at the expense of the tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of children who have suffered in silence over the decades.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce J. Cooke
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