Mr. Edward O’Donahue,
Chairperson
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee
Parliament House
Spring St
East Melbourne 3002

re: Preservation of the Human Rights Charter in its current form

Dear Sir,

We submit as citizens of Victoria and part of a Uniting Church faith community who value religious freedom.

1. However, we do not support the view, held by some religious groups, that they should be exempt from anti-discrimination legislation when employing people for secular work.

2. We believe the Victorian Charter of Human Rights is having a positive effect on those who administer the laws. In time we hope it will produce a "human rights culture" in our society. It would help this process if there were straightforward and inexpensive ways for those whose human rights have been breached by a public authority to seek redress, either by conciliation or litigation.

We urge the Review Committee to recommend accordingly.

3. We support the requirement that all new legislation be checked for compatibility with the human rights listed in the Charter, because it is an encouragement to the government of the day and to all parliamentarians to be conscious of the human rights of everyone.

4. We also believe that the human rights of marginalised and disadvantaged people need protecting, even in a free and democratic country like Australia. In particular, we are concerned for:
   - the homeless
   - asylum seekers
   - indigenous people
   - homosexual people
   - people with a mental illness
   - people belonging to unpopular racial and religious minority groups

5. We support the provision for judges to draw to the attention of Parliament examples of laws that cannot be interpreted in accordance with human rights standards, while leaving the final decision to Parliament.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Ray
Chairperson of Habitat Uniting Church and 20 members