



21 January 2019

Senator Ian McDonald
Chairperson
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Senator McDonald

INQUIRY INTO SEX DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT (REMOVING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST STUDENTS) BILL 2018

Amnesty International Australia welcomes the opportunity to submit to this inquiry. Amnesty International campaigns against direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion or belief, and we advocate for states to fulfil their obligations to prohibit racial and religious vilification.

Enclosed is Amnesty International Australia's submission to the Religious Freedom Review Expert Panel. The international legal frameworks of the human rights of freedom of religion, equality and non-discrimination, and the limitations of these rights are set out in sections 2 and 5 of the submission.

In that submission, Amnesty International Australia recommends that:

The Government amend anti-discrimination legislation to prohibit religious organisations or educational institutions in receipt of public funding or providing service on behalf of the government discriminating in the provision of those services in ways that would otherwise be unlawful.

Amnesty International reiterates the importance of this recommendation, and submits it to the Committee for consideration. To enact this recommendation, we ask that:

The Government repeal subsection 38(3) of the Sex Discrimination Act and amend subsection 37(1)(d) to clarify that it does not apply to the treatment of students, teachers and other staff by religious schools.

International Legal Framework

Every person is born free and equal in dignity and rights and is entitled to the rights and freedoms in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) without distinction of any kind.¹ As a signatory to the UDHR, the Australian Government is obliged to uphold the right to hold and practice religious and non-religious beliefs,² the right to decent and productive work,³ and the right to an education.⁴

¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 A(III), 10 December 1948, (UDHR) Article 1, 2.

² UDHR, Article 18; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), United Nations, Treaty Series, (1996) vol. 999, p. 171, Article 18; International Commission of Jurists, *Yogyakarta Principles - Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity*, 2007, Principle 21.

³ UDHR, Article 18; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), United Nations, Treaty Series, (1996) vol. 999, p. 171, Article 18; *Yogyakarta Principles*, Principle 21.

⁴ UDHR, Article 26; ICESCR, Article 13; *Yogyakarta Principles*, Principle 16.

It is crucial that the Committee is also guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.'⁵

Amnesty International Australia recommends that the Committee take special consideration of the Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (the 'Yogyakarta Principles'). It states that sexual orientation and gender identity are integral to every person's dignity and humanity and must not be the basis of discrimination or abuse.⁶

Students

Research indicates that LGBTQI children and young people are more likely to experience discrimination, bullying and abuse than other children and young people and are significantly more at risk of suicide, self-harm and mental health impacts as a result.⁷ 80 per cent of homophobic bullying involving LGBTI young people occurs at school and has a profound impact on their well-being and education⁸. The 'Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice' report while focussing on LGBT conversion therapy in Australia, said that when in religious schools 'students are taught that LGBT students are 'sinful', 'sick' or 'broken', this creates an atmosphere where they feel emboldened to bully LGBT students, with potentially devastating impacts.'⁹ Supportive, affirming and non-discriminatory environments, including school, have been shown to strongly mitigate the negative impacts of discrimination and abuse.¹⁰

Amnesty International Australia supports the repeal of subsection 38(3) of the *Sex Discrimination Act (Cth) 1984*, as provided for in Schedule 1, item 2 of the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Removing Discrimination Against Students) Bill 2018.

Amnesty International Australia does not support the Government amendments proposed in Amendment Sheets KQ147, KQ148, KQ149, KQ 150 and KQ151.

Teachers and staff in educational institutions

It is Amnesty International Australia's position that the same protections from discrimination which are proposed for students, are also extended to teachers and staff.

When balancing the tensions between the right to hold a religious belief, and the manifestation of that belief in the form of discrimination, Amnesty International Australia draws the Committee's attention to Yogyakarta Principle 16 which says that States should 'take all necessary legislative, administrative and other measure to ensure equal access to education, and equal treatment of students, staff and teachers within the education system' and to ensure that in addition to education being directed to the development of students' fullest potential, that it 'responds to the needs of students of all sexual orientations and gender identities.'¹¹

⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), United Nations, Treaty Series, vol 1577, page 3, Article 3.

⁶ *Yogyakarta Principles*, Principle 2.

⁷ National LGBTI Health Alliance, Statistics at a Glance, available at:

<https://lgbtihealth.org.au/statistics/?fbclid=IwAR2Z3wcmxboxQSZ9sqO1A7xzLkbyrqDDikMuFZkCS8lt9H5vw7foavpSEdY>.

⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014, Face the facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People, available at:

https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/7_FTF_2014_LGBTI.pdf

⁹ Jones, Brown, Carnie, Fletcher and Leonard, 'Preventing Harm, Promoting Justice, Responding to LGBT conversion therapy in Australia', (2018) La Trobe University and Human Rights Law Centre, page 69.

¹⁰ Olson, Durwood and McLaughlin, 2016, Mental health of transgender children who are supported in their identities, Pediatrics

¹¹ Yogyakarta Principles, Principle 16, A, B and E.

Two thirds of LGBTQI people conceal their LGBTQI identity or status at work.¹² Enabling teachers, staff and contract workers to acknowledge their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status without fear of discrimination or losing their job or contract, will benefit the students and the whole of the school community.

Amnesty International Australia recommends that the Government amend the relevant legislation in order to prohibit religious educational institutions that receive public funding from discriminating against teachers, staff and contractors in any way.

Summary of Recommendations

1. The Government repeal subsection 38(3) of the *Sex Discrimination Act* and amend subsection 37(1)(d) to clarify that it does not apply to the treatment of students, teachers and other staff by religious schools.
2. The Government amend anti-discrimination legislation to prohibit religious organisation or educational institutions in receipt of public funding or providing services on behalf of the government, discrimination in the provision of those services in ways that would otherwise be unlawful.

I thank the Committee in advance for your time and consideration. If the Committee requires any further information from Amnesty International Australia, please do not hesitate to contact Joel Clark on joel.clark@amnesty.org.au or 0424 242 112.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Bull
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¹² Diversity Council Australia, 2018, Out at work: from prejudice to pride, available at: <https://www.dca.org.au/media-releases/out-work-prejudice-pride>.