



Executive Council
of Australian Jewry Inc.

MEDIA STATEMENT

The Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

18 December 2017

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry has welcomed the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which was released on December 15.

“The Inquiry, its public hearings, findings and recommendations have been of seminal ongoing importance for the whole of Australian society”, said ECAJ President Anton Block.

“All Australians must take notice of the 189 recommendations made in the final Report. Jewish community institutions will need to pay special regard to recommendation 16.30, which calls on them to ensure that their complaint handling policies explicitly state that the halachic concepts of *mesirah*, *moser* and *loshon horo* do not apply to the communication and reporting of allegations of child sexual abuse to police and other civil authorities”.

At its annual conference on November 26, the ECAJ adopted a detailed policy concerning Child Sexual Abuse, with the backing of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies Task Force on Child Protection. The policy:

“RECOGNISES that child sexual abuse has occurred within some Jewish institutions;

RECOGNISES further that in some instances individuals in positions of leadership and trust within those institutions failed to report the abuse to the appropriate authorities and in doing so, acted unlawfully and unethically, and failed the children who had suffered the abuse and exacerbated their suffering, and brought shame to our community;

NOTES the halachic rule that the civil law of the land is binding (*dina d'malkhuta dina*) and supports fully the statements by Jewish religious and representative rabbinical bodies that “*there is a religious obligation to inform the relevant authorities of all information known concerning possible harmful criminal conduct, especially conduct as serious as child sexual abuse, and to co-operate with the authorities in every way to bring the perpetrators to justice*”;

AFFIRMS that the principle of *mesirah*, which precludes the reporting of fellow Jews to the secular authorities, was historically applied in places where Jews were subjected to institutional persecution and racism and could not receive just treatment by the civil authorities, and has no relevance or admissibility whatsoever in Australia, as has been stated by multiple Australian rabbinical sources;

CONDEMNS any concealment of, or failure to report, allegations of child sexual abuse and any instances of intimidation or retribution against children who have suffered sexual abuse or their families or other supporters, noting that all such conduct is unlawful, disgraceful and contrary to Jewish ethics and law, and serves to deepen the suffering of survivors and their families;

AFFIRMS the imperative of protecting children from harm, which is a core Jewish value, and calls on all organisations in the Jewish community to adopt and actively implement a policy of zero tolerance towards child sexual abuse, and to promote clear leadership and transparent governance to combat the secrecy on which abuse thrives; and

CALLS ON Jewish community organisations which have the care of children to adopt and implement appropriate standards of child protection if they have not already done so, and to work together with other Jewish organisations under the auspices of the Jewish community State roof bodies and the ECAJ to develop a best practice model of Jewish Professional Standards on Child Protection.”

Mr Block added, “I want to emphasise, especially in light of the Royal Commission’s final report, that the ECAJ calls on Jewish community organisations which at any time have the care of children to adopt and implement appropriate standards of child protection if they have not already done so, and to work together with other Jewish organisations, including Tzedek, under the auspices of the Jewish community State roof bodies and the ECAJ to develop a best practice model of Jewish Professional Standards on Child Protection. Leaders of Jewish organisations must take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety issues, so that the safety and wellbeing of children in each of their organisations is a paramount consideration when developing activities, policies and management practices”.

“It is not enough to express our deepest sympathy with all survivors of child sexual abuse and profound sorrow at the pain and ongoing hardship they have suffered, and to extend the same sentiments to the family and friends of survivors who have suffered in any way for supporting them. Our institutions must be proactive and vigilant to prevent any further instances of abuse occurring within them, and we need to extend whatever support may be necessary to survivors of child sexual abuse in their pursuit of justice and redress.”

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