



# Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) Responds to ALRC Report on Anti-Discrimination Laws

Monday 25th March, 2024

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), the peak body representing Muslims across Australia, notes and responds to the Australian Law Reform Commission's (ALRC) recommendations on religious educational institutions and anti-discrimination laws.

AFIC understands that the ALRC's inquiry was framed within the Australian Government's policy as outlined in the Terms of Reference. This policy mandates educational institutions operated under religious doctrines not to discriminate against students or staff based on sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status, or pregnancy. However, it is crucial to understand that the ALRC's scope was to address how such a policy could be implemented, not to debate the fundamental policy decision of whether such changes should occur.

AFIC has consistently maintained that there should be no changes in this area. "Our position is clear; religious educational institutions are foundational to practicing and manifesting our faith. Altering the current framework compromises the very essence of religious freedom," said Dr. Rateb Jneid, President of AFIC.

The balance between the freedom of religion and the right to manifest religion against other human rights cannot be adequately addressed with the proposed changes. "Institutions built upon religious values offer essential environments for those seeking education within a faith-based context. It is not appropriate for other rights to take precedence in such spaces," Dr. Jneid added.

Furthermore, AFIC emphasises that individuals choose to engage with religious institutions with full awareness of their environment. "Everyone has the freedom to choose. Those who opt for, or to work within, religious educational institutions do so knowing the values these institutions uphold. There are ample alternatives that align more closely with other personal values for those who seek them," Dr. Jneid explained.

AFIC's submission to the ALRC underscored the importance of allowing religious communities to operate their educational institutions in ways that are consistent with their faith principles. This includes the ability to make employment decisions and structure educational content that aligns with religious teachings, without the imposition of external values that conflict with their core beliefs.

As the debate around the implementation of the ALRC's recommendations unfolds, AFIC calls for a thoughtful dialogue that respects the fundamental rights and freedoms of religious communities. Our educational institutions are not just places of learning, they are environments where faith is lived and breathed. The integrity of these spaces must be preserved for the continued flourishing of a pluralistic Australian society.

AFIC calls upon the Australian Government to reconsider its decision to change the existing policy regarding religious educational institutions and anti-discrimination laws. "We urge the Government to



# Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) Responds to ALRC Report on Anti-Discrimination Laws

Monday 25th March, 2024

halt any action based on the ALRC recommendations until there has been a full and comprehensive consultation on the fundamental policy change itself," said Dr. Rateb Jneid, President of AFIC. "It is imperative that the voices of religious communities are heard and that the deep implications of such changes are thoroughly understood. Our society's strength lies in its ability to respect and protect diverse ways of life, including the practice and education of faith."

For further dialogue and inquiries, AFIC welcomes engagement from the Government, stakeholders, and the broader community to ensure that any future policy developments truly reflect the inclusive and diverse nature of Australian society.

---

*AFIC, established in 1964, stands as the Peak Muslim Organisation in Australia, with 170 members including 9 State and Territory Councils. It has a rich history of pioneering numerous community services and actively advocating for the rights and representation of the Muslim community.*

**Authorised:**

Dr Rateb Jneid  
President of AFIC

