



PARLIAMENT of AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-COMMITTEE

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

Inquiry into the status of religion or belief

Issue date: 30 November

Laws protecting freedom of religion reviewed

A parliamentary committee has released a report focusing on the current status of laws protecting the freedom of religion or belief in Australia.

The interim report examines laws at Commonwealth, State and Territory level. It discusses the strengths and weaknesses of Australia's legal framework and canvasses a range of opinions on how to strengthen religious protection in Australia.

The Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has tabled the interim report today, for its inquiry into the status of the human right to freedom of religion or belief.

The Chair of the Human Rights Sub-Committee, Mr Kevin Andrews MP, said that it was important for the Sub-Committee to first gain an understanding of Australia's own legal framework before considering the issue of religious freedom more broadly.

"The inquiry held public hearings with leading legal and constitutional academics, human rights groups and government agencies," Mr Andrews said. "The weight of the evidence from these witnesses suggests that the legal protection for the freedom of religion or belief in Australia is limited."

The report also highlights the tension that exists between freedom of religion or belief and other human rights, in particular the right to non-discrimination.

"Many submissions and witnesses expressed concern at the narrow protection for religious freedom in Australian law," Mr Andrews said.

"The interim report gives us an opportunity to reflect on how effectively Australia is meeting its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international human rights instruments," he said. "With this foundation we can begin to consider whether Australia needs a more comprehensive legislative framework for the protection of religious freedom."

The interim report is titled *Legal Foundations of Religious Freedom in Australia* and is available at the Sub-Committee [website](#)

Mr Kevin Andrews MP (Menzies, Victoria), Chair of the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

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For background:

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