

Presbyterian Church of Australia

Church and Nation Committee

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BY: 



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To the Secretary
Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA A.C.T. 2600.

Dear Sir,

Introduction

This submission is from the Church and Nation Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. This Committee is charged with the responsibility of investigating moral and ethical questions on the denomination's behalf; it also has the responsibility to state the denomination's view where its Federal Assembly has adopted a particular position on an issue.

Executive Summary

The committee wishes to make one main comment to the enquiry. It wishes to see all Australians embracing one law code with no thought given to allowing separate systems.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia is the fourth largest Protestant Christian denomination in Australia. From the 1830s onwards our denomination has been actively involved in encouraging and facilitating migration, as well as helping newly arrived immigrants to settle in.

Currently, our largest single congregation in Australia is the Crown Street Sydney congregation comprised of both Australian-born and first-generation Chinese-speaking Australians.

Not only do we have Chinese members in many other congregations, but also Koreans, Sudanese, Samoans, Indonesians, Brazilians, Japanese, Hungarians, Arabic-speakers from various countries of the middle East and migrants of other ethnicities as members of our congregations. We are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural.

We affirm the mainstream consensus view in Australia that migration has been an overwhelming success for our country. We wish to record that the Christian churches have played a very significant part in helping settle migrants and displaced and distressed refugees.

In recent years, our denomination has become involved in the teaching of English as a second language - the TESOL program. We would like to do more.

It should therefore be appreciated from its record that the committee and the whole Presbyterian Church, including the majority of its members are sympathetic to migrants in particular and migration in general.

We do however have one particular concern. We mention above that we have members originally from the Middle East. Like all migrants they came to Australia hoping to make a better life for themselves and their children. However in their case they also came seeking relief from Islamic persecution which they experienced either through direct action by Governments or in their local communities.

Informed by these members' experience, our concern is that with the increase of Islamic migration and refugee intake into Australia, that these people understand through Government initiatives that Sharia, ie. Islamic law cannot co-exist as a parallel legal system in Australia. Some aspects of Sharia can appear benign but in other respects its thrust is harmful to the social consensus within the Judeo Christian framework of a Western country.

Therefore, whilst we have read the Terms Of Reference of this enquiry and welcome its thrust such as the desire to see all newcomers successfully integrated into Australia and their productive contribution to our society socially, economically and culturally recognized and celebrated, we raise caveat over Islamic migration to this country.

We do not want the acceptance of any parallel legal system, especially Sharia in Australia, and this includes the Islamic financial system or Sharia courts used in the settlement of family disputes. We have written to the Trade Minister, the Hon Simon Crean with our concerns about this matter (letter attached).

Positively, we support every encouragement given by Government that all Australians, including those of the Islamic faith, embrace, support and uphold the Australian legal system.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Stefan Slucki
Convener