

Dear Sirs, I am glad that a Parliamentary Committee has been given a little more time to examine these crucial proposals. I enclose for your consideration a letter recently sent from our committee to the Prime Minister, the Federal Attorney-general and each State Premier. Yours Sincerely- Humphrey Tranter

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA REGIONAL MEETING

Peace and Social Justice Committee

Blackwood  
SA

7 October 2005

The Hon John Howard, Prime Minister  
GPO Box 59  
Sydney, NSW 2001

Dear John Howard,

We are deeply concerned at the recent proposed measures to strengthen counter-terrorism laws, as discussed at the recent COAG meeting; and we are disappointed, but not surprised, at the readiness with which all State Premiers agreed to them. We are convinced that they have been put together in the haste of a perceived emergency situation, and will not withstand the scrutiny of further, calmer consideration.

Under these proposals it seems that a boy of 16 can be arrested for 14 days without charge; people can be monitored on mere suspicion for up to a year, and very likely longer, using electronic tagging or house arrest. The bases of our legal system, the presumption of innocence until proved guilty, the proscription of arrest without charge, and the rights to liberty and privacy, are utterly destroyed.

The power to imprison suspects without charge is the hallmark of a totalitarian state.

We know that the Australian public is frightened by the scare of terrorism, especially after the recent atrocities in Bali, and the bombings in London, and these draconian

measures might well have the support of many, perhaps even a majority at the moment. But once forfeited, these basic liberties are going to be very hard to regain, though their loss will surely be regretted. And we are not convinced that the existing powers given to ASIO and the AFP are inadequate, though we can understand them wanting more. The political temptation to appear tough on terrorism has been irresistible to State and Federal legislators, none of whom, presumably, are averse to an increase in powers.

The proposals nowhere mention the situation of Australian Muslims, but everyone, especially the Islamic Community itself, believes that they are especially aimed at them. They are already seen as alienating the moderate elements among them, whose co-operation is so essential in combating extremism.

We earnestly ask you to reconsider the proposals, and to insist that, if at present inevitable, they be clearly signalled as temporary and emergency measures only, to be revised on a monthly (rather than annual) basis. Otherwise we fear that the Commonwealth of Australia will become, and will be seen by the world to be, little better than a police state, unworthy to champion the cause of Liberty and Democracy; as totalitarian in its regime as the worst of those elements these proposals are designed to combat.

Yours Sincerely

Humphrey Tranter (for the Committee)  
cc State Premiers & AGs