
Religious prejudice in political arena should be addressed with human rights Act

Tuesday, 16 February, 2010

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's comments in the media yesterday about keeping Muslims out of Australia using border protection measures shows how faith is creeping in to politics and the need for a human rights Act for Australia.

Australian Lawyers Alliance president, Mark Blumer, said an Act, enshrining those rights Australians hold dear, would help protect our democracy from such personal bias.

"Australians need an impenetrable, statutory provision with constitutional certainty that they know beyond any doubt will protect and defend them against any attack on their civil rights," Alliance national president, Mr Blumer, said.

"Without such a document, government leaders can decide to ban entry because of their own religious bias, but with a human rights Act personal prejudice can be challenged," he said.

Mr Blumer said, in recent times, both sides of politics had been guilty of using the religious message, blatantly or subliminally, to win votes, just as the 'tough on crime' political tactic used fear to win votes.

As a result we are seeing civil rights being eroded across the country with the introduction of legislation curbing the right to free association, mandatory sentencing of youth in Western Australia and race-based laws such as the intervention.

These new laws, that are creeping in, should be of real concern to all Australians who value their quality of life. They are paternalistic and infringe on basic human rights."

Mr Blumer said the argument being forwarded against the need for a human rights Act, was that this would give the judiciary more power.

"The only power that the statutory model, being considered, would give would be the right to ask questions of the government when making decisions. Laws that appear to be inconsistent with such an Act would also be highlighted and then go back to parliament for reconsideration.

"Let's not any of us be naïve here. Politics is not always about true suffrage and representation. Politicians often use their power inappropriately and there are those elected by a minority that hold the government to ransom because of their parliamentary balance of power.

“We are the only democratic country in the world that doesn’t have such a legal instrument to help protect our fundamental beliefs about what is right and fair.

“Isn’t it high time we got rid of this loop hole that continues to trip up the rights of all Australians and to ensure decision making is free of prejudice?” Mr Blumer said.

To view Mr Abbott’s recent comments, see:

<http://player.sbs.com.au/naca/#/naca/wna/Latest/playlist/Abbott-outlines-healthcare-plan/>

For more details contact: Australian Lawyers Alliance, public affairs manager, Mandy Wyer on 0418 270 656 or Alliance president, Mark Blumer, 0408 687 098.