

Multifaith Statement' on assisted dying delivered to Deputy Premier

Melbourne Catholic Media and Communications Office, Wednesday 11 October 2017

Today, representatives of Victoria's leading religions gathered on the steps of Parliament to deliver a joint statement to Deputy Premier, James Merlino, regarding the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill.

The 'Multifaith Statement' is signed by Sheikh Isse Abdo Musse (President, Board of Imams Victoria), Phra Khru Kampee-panya-witthet (Abbot, Melbourne Thai Buddhist Temple), Makarand Bhagwat (Victorian Director, Hindu Council of Australia), Rabbi Daniel Rabin (President, Rabbinical Council of Victoria), Jasbir Singh Suropada (Chairman, Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria) and Bishop Peter Danaher (President, Victorian Council of Churches).

Kawalpreet Singh, from the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria, stood next to the Deputy Premier as he read the statement before the faith representatives each said their names in support of the shared announcement.

Asking the Parliament to reject the proposed assisted dying legislation, the statement highlighted the shared beliefs of the religious leaders.

'We are of different faiths but, in our diverse communities, we believe in compassion,' read Mr Singh. 'Compassion is best addressed to the alleviation of suffering and the care for life, which our traditions deem precious.'



'We are concerned that deliberate interventions to end life tear at the fabric of our society.'

'We urge, for the good of the entire community, that the Government extend access to palliative care to all Victorians who need it.'

Mr Merlino, who has publicly expressed his opposition to the Bill, commended the solidarity of the multi-faith gathering and said it was important to consider their perspective.

‘For the different faith communities to come together in such a strong way is unprecedented,’ said the Deputy Premier, ‘I will make sure that all my colleagues in Parliament are aware.’

Makarand Bhagwat, from the Hindu Council of Australia, also pointed to the clear accord between the religious leaders, echoing Mr Merlino’s sentiments.

‘All of us coming together here is an extraordinary thing. It demonstrates to the Parliament that we are all together especially on the matter of such sensitive issues.’

‘I’m here today to be with colleagues and people of other faiths to together witness our misgivings and our unhappiness with this proposed legislation,’ explained the Victorian Council of Churches’ signatory, Bishop Peter Danaher. ‘We need to focus far more on palliative care and the care of all those who are facing the final parts of their life.’

Executive Officer of the Ecumenical Interfaith Commission, David Schütz, said that although joint religious action was infrequent, the united display underlined the importance of the issue and the mutual respect that exists between Victoria’s religious communities.

‘This Bill, while attempting to uphold that dignity through enabling personal autonomy, actually greatly endangers the security and care of the many for the sake of a few,’ he said. ‘This group represents the result of a lot of dialogue and hard work.’ ‘So we have been discussing, drinking tea and eating cake together for a long time in order to prepare for this day,’ added Mr Schütz.