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For immediate release

CHURCH CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO RESPECT DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

The Uniting Church today expressed its disappointment at the Government's handling of its counter-terrorism, Welfare to Work and workplace relations changes.

Uniting Church President, the Reverend Dr Dean Drayton said the Church was concerned at the haste in which these Bills had been put to Parliament and called on the Federal Government to ensure that the integrity of the democratic process is maintained.

“We acknowledge that Governments must make difficult and often unpopular decisions. However, there has been no justification given for restricting public and parliamentary debate on these major pieces of legislation. The haste with which they have been pushed through the Senate is completely at odds with their significance for the future of all Australians.”

Rev. Drayton also expressed concern at the Government curtailing the length and scope of the Senate inquiries into WorkChoices and Anti-Terrorism legislation.

“Decisions of this magnitude must be made with the utmost transparency and a high level of community and specialist consultation and awareness. But the passage of these pieces of legislation has instead been characterised by an unwillingness to provide any substantial justification, an absolute minimum level of community consultation and a marked cynicism towards criticism of any kind.

“The short times allocated for the inquiries – in the case of the Anti-Terrorism Bill, only one day – were entirely inadequate to address the wide range of concerns and the hundreds of submissions. In both cases, the Government has declined to make necessary valid changes to protect the rights and basic needs of its citizens.

“The Government must fulfil its responsibility to ensure that unintended consequences of new legislation are avoided and that all citizens are dealt with fairly and equitably under legislative change. The fact the Government now has control of both houses of Parliament only increases its responsibility to use that power carefully and wisely.”

Rev. Drayton said that the Church would continue to advocate for open and transparent democratic decision making.

“We are deeply concerned that the Government is so easily prepared to gag debate in the Senate. This is an abuse of power and shows scant regard for the democratic processes that are so fundamental to our national identity,” Rev. Drayton said.

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