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For immediate release

ANTI-TERROR LAWS PUT AUSTRALIA ON A DANGEROUS PATH

The Federal Government's anti-terror legislation puts Australia on a dangerous path according to the Uniting Church President, the Reverend Dr Dean Drayton.

"While every Government has a responsibility to protect its citizens, these new laws send a clear message that the only way to do this is to erode people's rights. They have the potential to create an atmosphere of fear and distrust in Australia.

"We are concerned the Government has failed to allow adequate time for public discussion and debate about the proposed laws. It is unacceptable that the community is being told to accept measures that radically curtail civil liberties without widespread and substantial consultation."

"Preventative detention without judicial sanction is out of step with community expectations of accountability and transparency. Administrative detention has a dark history in some of the most oppressive regimes in the world. It is imperative, therefore, that a very clear case is made for its introduction and that appropriate and stringent safeguards be put in place. The Government must ensure that this legislation is not open to abuse," Rev. Drayton said.

"We are concerned about the erosion of community trust. What will it do to the psyche of the Australian people to know they can be detained with no recourse and no way of telling their loved ones what is happening or making arrangements for work commitments?"

Rev. Drayton said the Church was also concerned that these new laws could threaten freedom of association and speech.

"We are especially concerned that these laws will result in suppression of peaceful activism, religious freedom and expression and may be used to discriminate against members of the Islamic community. The recent deportation of peace activist Scott Parkin was conducted with no explanation. We do not know and cannot know why he was determined to be such a grievous threat and we are concerned that these new laws will further entrench this culture of secrecy."

Rev. Drayton said that politicians must remain accountable to the electorate and they must act to protect civil liberties.

"We all want to live in security, but laws which take action against citizens without the sanction of the judicial system damage trust and needlessly engender fear. We urge our political leaders to work for an open and tolerant Australia committed to overcoming violence through peaceful means."

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