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Submission of the PSA Women's Network on the Human Rights Amendment Bill 2023

About the PSA Women's Network

The PSA is New Zealand's largest and oldest union, with a membership of over 83,000, the majority of whom are female. In addition, our union is ethnically diverse, with members from a wide range of different backgrounds and cultures, including Māori, Pasifika, Asian and many other ethnicities.

The PSA's women's network mission is:

By women, of women, for women – our commitment is to identify and promote industrial, economic, political and social issues of concern to PSA women members and advance these issues within the PSA and externally.

Our network is wholly committed to advancing the rights and freedoms not only of PSA women members, but of all women, both within Aotearoa and globally.

This submission

The first part of this submission outlines our position on this legislation. We support the offering of protection from hate speech on the grounds of religious beliefs. We advocate that the legislation goes further and offers similar protection to people from hate speech based on gender, gender expression and identity, sexual orientation, and disability. The second part of this submission is personal statements from the committee outlining the urgency of addressing hate speech, particularly misogynist hate speech

Our feedback on the legislation

We support legislation to protect people against hate speech. The PSA Women's Network committee acknowledges and supports the intent of the Human Rights Amendment Bill 2023 to provide better protections for faith-based groups.



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We further strongly encourage the inclusion of better protections for women in this Bill, due to the increasingly disturbing levels of hate speech and unconscionable threats of violence to which former Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, has recently been subjected. Violence towards women - and particularly towards women in positions of power - is increasing. It would be folly to miss the window of opportunity Ms Ardern's experience offers us to make a clear, powerful statement that misogyny will not be tolerated in Aotearoa.

New Zealanders are currently discussing and reflecting on the issues which have led to Ms Ardern's resignation and realising the increasing gravity of the levels of violence women are being forced to endure, both here and globally. The inclusion of women in the Bill at this time will ultimately lead to a wider discussion - and greater acceptance - of including stronger protection for all marginalised groups, something we understand the government has already been striving to achieve, despite significant public backlash.

We also believe that other groups that are discriminated against should receive protection under this bill. **We recommend widening the prohibited grounds to include: gender, gender expression and identity, sexual orientation and disability.**

Statements of PSA Women's Network Committee Members

Nancy McShane, Co-Convener

As a Cantabrian, I was in Cathedral Square, attending a School Strike for Climate event, on the day the mosque attacks occurred.

I vividly remember the feelings of hope and optimism emanating from our young people that morning, as they took their first fledgling steps towards creating a safe future for themselves and our planet. The air was filled with promise.

Within hours, that feeling had dissipated completely as my city descended into hell, following one man's hate driven, murderous rampage through a place of prayer.

Some weeks after his brutal, senseless attacks, I attended a peace march in our city to demonstrate solidarity with our local Muslim community in the wake of their devastating loss.

A young Muslim woman stood to address the crowd, attended by her 5-year-old son, whose father had been one of those murdered in the shootings.

As someone who has frequently spoken in public, it was clear to me that this woman had never done such a thing in her life. Yet, in the midst of her fear and grief, she spoke with dignity, grace and power, dedicating herself, in front of a diverse crowd of supporters, to honouring her husband's memory. She would, she told us, make it her life's work to speak out against violence and hatred in this country. I was in awe of her courage.



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That evening, I went home and sobbed tears of grief for her in my bathroom. I remember looking at myself in the mirror and having a very visceral experience of what the statement “They are Us” means. We are indeed all connected; one person’s suffering is the suffering of us all.

In this past week, we have now learned that our previous Prime Minister – a woman who provided strong, effective, compassionate leadership throughout this tragedy; a woman who comforted numerous members of our Muslim communities, not only with her words but with her own personal gestures of affection – has been subjected to the same degree of hate-filled rhetoric, discrimination and death threats as they were on that terrible day.

How ironic – and how shameful – that a nation who responded with empathy, compassion and solidarity in the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attacks, should now turn on the very woman who guided us through that darkest period of our nation’s history and subject her to that same level of terror.

Sadly, her experience is not unique. Women globally are experiencing a backlash against their forays into positions of leadership and power. Threats of rape and murder are increasingly common.

I recently read of a survey conducted in American universities, asking young women about their leadership aspirations.

The response was overwhelmingly that they did not have any such aspirations - they had seen the level of violent abuse directed at women currently holding positions of power and had no wish to be thus targeted. How is this equality?

I think we need to look long and hard at ourselves and pause to reflect on what exactly our words and actions are contributing to.

The eyes of the world were upon us in the wake of the Christchurch attacks. People globally witnessed a very different style of leadership from our previous Prime Minister, one that drew a nation together in a demonstration of love, compassion and acceptance.

Yet here we are, some years later, vilifying and condemning that same New Zealand woman to the point where she has suffered death threats, and threats against the life of her own child.

I am strongly in favour of providing improved protections for faith-based groups against hate speech.

I am also aware that in 2022 the Government consulted on a range of proposals that would widen hate speech protections to cover other groups (including religion, disability, age, family status, sex and sexual orientation) and to add trans, gender diverse and intersex people to the list of groups protected against discrimination.



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However, based on the significant backlash they received, most of the proposals have been deferred for “more work” to be undertaken. The result of this is that while religious groups will now receive greater protection from hate speech, other groups (like women, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities) will not.

I would impress upon those reading this submission, the urgency with which our government must work to expand the range of groups provided with improved protections beyond solely faith-based groups. For if we delay this task, and delay taking active steps to promote greater understanding and tolerance within Aotearoa, then our country is ripe for another event like the Christchurch terrorist attacks to occur.

The one silver lining to the resignation of Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, is that it provides us with a window of opportunity to include greater protections for women in the Human Rights Amendment Bill 2023. Utilising that opportunity now will open the door for other groups to then also be included.

We must take this step, while the eyes of the world are again upon us.

We must live up to our history of progressing the rights and freedoms of women.

We must be a beacon of light to women in every country who are being subjected to hate speech and intolerable acts of violence and murder.

The lessons from the Christchurch terrorist attacks are continuing to unfold.

Let us learn quickly and well and let us once again demonstrate right speech and right action towards those who are marginalised as an example for others to follow.

To quote **Bacha Khan** – Pashtun political / spiritual leader and devout Muslim:

“If you wish to know how civilized a culture is, look at how they treat it’s women.”

Or in the words of our own Tangata Whenua:

“Me aro koe ki te ha o Hine-ahu-One”

(Pay heed to the dignity of women.)

Now is the time to do both.

Sonja Lister, Co-Convener:

I strongly support this Bill and the addition to provide better protection from speech which incites hostility towards groups based on their religious beliefs. As the committee member



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representative from Tāmaki Makaurau it is important to have a safe space for the freedom of the choice for religious beliefs to enable a truly multi-cultural city.

I have been privileged to be part of a family structure that openly celebrates and welcomes different religious beliefs. Having Hare Krishna, Christian, and Hindu beliefs has enabled us to be more aware of others' viewpoints but also enabled a wider celebration of all aspects of life in general, but also aware of the incited hate at times, due to the lack of understanding.

Hate speech can severely impact people and their feelings of safety in general and it would be wise to include other groups that are discriminated against such as sexual orientation in this Bill as well to give greater safety in NZ to all.

Leota Alice Meredith:

I note the proposed changes in this amendment Bill are currently focused on improving protections for faith-based groups against hate speech.

I work in a city of diversity where both Christian and non-Christian schools' co-habit but there have been times when these schools are targeted for their ethnicity, gender, skin colour and language – always with the message of “this is New Zealand” or “Go back where you came from”. It is through posters, mailbox drops or open graffiti by angry people.

The following examples from my own personal experience are offered as evidence of such 'hate crimes' against people of ethnic, gender, skin colour and language. For me, it is about the message we send to those who may not be aware of religious schools that are single-sex female only. How religious schools - especially non-Christian schools - are always targeted for 'hate' or incited in society but also the message to our 'young women' who attend such schools regarding the challenges in the world they already face, both within their world and general society.

Verity Forbes:

I strongly support widening this legislation to cover other groups discriminated against (such as women, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities). This is very front of mind right now, given former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's continued experiences of aggression and death threats.

Focussing on the female lens specifically, I'm aware aggression and hostility are common barrier patterns which can channel females into subordinate roles, particularly within economic and political spheres. Various researchers have found females are as inherently ambitious as males (Devillard et al., 2018; Plan International, 2019), and ask for promotion at similar rates to males (Artz et al., 2018), but are less likely to be promoted (Devillard et al., 2018). It is the inherent barriers, such as hostile organisational culture, (Douglas, 2017), perceived inequities in advancement opportunities (Devillard et al., 2018), and concerns



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about being the recipients of discrimination and sexual harassment (Plan International, 2019), that curb females' ambitions, more than having children.

Explicit discrimination and tolerance of gendered and other bigoted behaviour has no place in New Zealand. An environment which tolerates such biases not only causes intrinsic detrimental impact to females (and other recipients), but there are also significant economic and innovation opportunity costs of not fully developing and utilising half the world's talent pool. We need to continually challenge these social environments that are founded in culturally traditional, patriarchal mental models. NZ needs legal teeth to effectively break down this significant barrier to equality and wellbeing. Let's not delay further.

References:

- Devillard, S., Hunt, V., & Yee, L. (2018). Still looking for room at the top: Ten years of research on women in the workplace. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, 2, 107.
- Plan International. (2019). *Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women on changing the Face of Leadership*. Plan International & Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. <https://plan-international.org/publications/taking-the-lead>
- Artz, B., Goodall, A. H., & Oswald, A. J. (2018). Do Women Ask? *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 57(4), 611–636. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irel.12214>
- Douglas, G. (2017). No women in leadership? Blame company culture. *HR Focus*, 94(6), 15.

Jane Griffin:

It's been sobering to view the loss of our Prime Minister this week, frightening that she has experienced such appalling hate speech and yet sustaining to see Carmel Sepuloni step up.

She looks determined but must be filled with a level of trepidation over the thought of what has happened to Jacinda Ardern.

In respect of the ongoing struggles around Kia Toipoto and equal pay there is already a disadvantage for women and an endless need for us to battle to support one another before seeking any leadership challenge – especially Māori and Pacific women in Aotearoa.

The thought of having to battle on so many fronts and ensure that one's family and self are not endangered, would deter and moderate the aspirations of even the bravest among us.

For these reasons and for all the other equally compelling thoughts expressed by this committee I support this submission relating to the Human Rights Amendment Bill.



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Karina Radcliffe:

The resignation of Jacinda Ardern has really brought into sharp focus for me the hate speech and misogyny that our women leaders face.

I have had two guests at my home on different occasions where I have felt compelled to challenge their targeting of Jacinda Ardern, their premise being that she is "the devastator of our country."

I mean, really!!!

Where do these attitudes come from??!

I do not recall any male leaders in our history being subject to such personal attacks - they literally do not make sense!

Even Helen Clark, advised the media she has never been subject to this level of hatred.

We definitely have to address this.

It is escalating and will lead to women not putting themselves forward for leadership positions.

I am absolutely horrified by this. While I fully acknowledge and support the need to provide better protections for faith-based groups, I am equally in favour of more being done to protect New Zealand women in light of the extreme violence and hate speech to which Jacinda Ardern has been subjected.

Waiho i te toipoto,

Kaua i te toiroa

(Let us keep close together, not wide apart)

Nia Bartley:

I absolutely love Wellington, Aotearoa NZ. It is my place of birth, residence and where I work. I was raised in a Catholic & Protestant family with a large extended family on both sides. Family and friends are Christian, Mormon, Jehovah's witnesses, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Sukyo Mahikari and Anglican, just to name a few. And from many generations prior from both sides of my family, I have Irish and Pasifika ancestors who were missionaries. Nowadays, there are fewer people practising or sharing publicly their religious beliefs for fear of being ridiculed or the target of verbal, mental or physical attacks.



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I have often wondered whether the perpetrators of unnecessary hateful attacks on people were not cared for or given enough love? Dis/mis-information in the public domain via the internet has amplified the toxicity of negative verbal diarrhoea to pervade the psyche of our citizens of society where their cognitive gifts of deciphering right from wrong have been stymied. Our society overall has taken many steps back with the normalisation of not just bad but extremely dangerous behaviour. There is a lack of understanding, a refusal to accept the unique differences we all have. Respect, honour and love for each other has diminished and sadly it has been superseded by greed and people selfishly thinking only of their needs. The ego has landed and is self-serving and vile.

The continued misogynist persecution of our previous Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, other female MPs, female leaders of ministries, organisations and businesses are testament to this. Women in roles not in the public eye are regularly exposed. We must remember everyone, irrespective of their role (paid and unpaid) should be protected.

I support this amendment to protect religious groups. There is too much hatred and right-wing tidal waves sweeping locally and it is up to all of us to fight and protect the vulnerable. We need to immediately include better protection for all other groups, Māori, Pasifika, ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ and our whanau with disabilities. For positive humanity, let's make and give more love.

In the lyrics of the late Michael Jackson's 1991 song, Heal the world:

"Heal the world/Make it a better place/For you and for me and the entire human race/There are people dying/If you care enough for the living/Make a better place for you and for me".

We can do this.

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