

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Peter Flinn, *[telephone number removed]*
kelspec@bigpond.com

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No comfort for Exclusive Brethren in PM's response to submission

In a letter received this week, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd acknowledges the concerns raised with him by former members of the Exclusive Brethren.

Ex-member spokesman Peter Flinn said it was clear from the Prime Minister's letter that his views have not changed from those stated last year when he described the Exclusive Brethren as an "extremist cult and sect" whose activities "break up families".

Mr Rudd was responding to a submission on behalf of 33 Brethren ex-members from around the world. He said he remains concerned about the Brethren's "reported imposition of doctrines that weaken family bonds."

Mr Flinn said that the detailed submission was sent to Mr Rudd expressing deep concern about the recent controversial political and financial activities of the Exclusive Brethren, and the damage they have inflicted on families over many years, often spanning generations.

"We raised many questions about disproportionately high taxpayer funding of Brethren schools, dishonest political campaigning, their charitable status in relation to rate and tax exemptions, and their well-known intimidatory tactics during traumatic Family Court cases," Mr Flinn said.

"We asked the Prime Minister for a high level review into the activities of the Exclusive Brethren, and to reinforce our case we included thirteen contributed life stories, some quite horrific, outlining experiences of Brethren life."

Whilst Mr Rudd did not give a specific commitment to such an inquiry, he acknowledged the "moving personal accounts" and said that "religious observance should not be regarded as a shield behind which breaches of the law can be hidden."

The Prime Minister also said that his Government was committed to enhancing transparency in the Australian electoral system, with reforms recently announced relating to the disclosure and sources of donations.

Mr Flinn said that more stringent supervision of political donations was essential to prevent recurrence of the tactics used by the Exclusive Brethren in recent election campaigns.

"We also await with interest the release of a Government Green Paper on electoral reform later this year".

Mr Flinn stressed that ex-members of the Exclusive Brethren were not out to settle scores or looking for revenge, despite many having been scarred for life by their experiences.

“We have no desire to interfere with the fundamental right of any religious group to freely and openly practise its beliefs. We just want to highlight other equally fundamental human rights, such as access to family who remain Brethren members, a right callously denied by the Brethren for decades.”

“This submission, and the Prime Minister’s response to it, is just another step along the way. We will never be diverted from our objectives of re-uniting families torn apart by this cruel sect, supporting often severely stressed ex-members, and providing a lifeline for fearful and sometimes suicidal ‘refugees’ trying to escape the clutches of the Exclusive Brethren.”

The submission to the Prime Minister can be read on the website www.peeps.net under “Resources” on the home page, reference: *Submission to Kevin Rudd (2008)*

Note: the Exclusive Brethren are currently engaged in legal action in the USA aimed at closing down this website. If successful, this action would make it harder for those seeking to escape the cult to contact ex-members who are prepared to assist them.
