Australia's campaign to
stop violence against women

White Ribbon

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White Ribbon Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Exposure Draft Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012

Introductory Information – About White Ribbon

The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest global male-led movement to stop violence against women and the first male-led violence prevention campaign in Australia.

The White Ribbon Campaign is working to prevent the most common and pervasive form of male violence – that towards women.

As a first step, White Ribbon encourages Australian men to swear an Oath ***never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women***. The White Ribbon Oath is not just a "feel good" statement, it is an active commitment which guides positive attitudes towards women and drives signatories to, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, *be the change you want to see in the world*. The White Ribbon Campaign in Australia is led by thousands of male Ambassadors who, through living the White Ribbon Oath, act as positive role models in their communities. These men have taken up the challenge to help bring about attitudinal and behavioural change that allows violence to occur and be accepted. The campaign is run by White Ribbon Australia which was established in 2007 to provide the campaign with a sustainable structure to take it forward; and in recognition that achieving attitudinal and behavioural change towards violence requires a long term and high profile commitment to working within communities across Australia. White Ribbon is a not for profit company that provides the governance structure for the national campaign and capacity to raise funds to support community awareness activities and programs. Women also support and expand the Campaign through their communities and networks.

White Ribbon works to change the attitudes and behaviours which lead to violence against women through awareness raising campaigns, community events, and initiatives in schools, universities, workplaces, and sporting codes. Support for this activity comes through a mixture of community fundraising, corporate and government funding.

White Ribbon also gives expression to prevention strategies that are critical to deliver the objectives identified under the Council of Australian Governments' ratified *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 - 2022*.

Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

White Ribbon Australia makes this brief submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee in response to its Inquiry regarding the Exposure Draft of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012 because of its commitment to improving the lives of women across Australia.

White Ribbon commends the Government on the important progress made through the consolidation of the federal anti-discrimination laws in the Exposure Draft of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012. This Bill, as highlighted in the Terms of Reference, will provide protections to Australians while ensuring improved processes and measures related to complaints and compliance.

White Ribbon recognises that there remain pertinent issues that have gone unaddressed in this consolidation. We are especially concerned with the omission of domestic violence as a protected attribute in section 17 of the Bill. This omission has been publicly confirmed by the Office of the Attorney-General, which stated that at this time the Australian Government does not view the Bill as the means to pursue issues in this area.

The exclusion was raised in submissions by the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVC). White Ribbon agrees with the arguments of the ADFVC and the conclusion that the absence of protections granted to persons based on 'domestic violence victim status' will leave individuals vulnerable to discrimination. White Ribbon therefore supports the recommendations in the HRC submission (section 8.1) to:

- Accompany the introduction of the Bill into Parliament with a commitment to continuing review and needs and options for measures to eliminate discrimination based on experience of domestic violence
- If not addressed sooner, these issues should be included in the three year review provided by the Bill rather than this review being confined to review of exceptions.