



OPEN LETTER

To the New Zealand Prime Minister from the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) in Aotearoa New Zealand regarding the National Apology

25 October 2024

Rt Hon Christopher Luxon
Prime Minister of New Zealand
Parliament Office
Wellington 6160
NEW ZEALAND

Dear Hon. Christopher Luxon, tēnā koe!

We write to you as the New Zealand chapter of the world's largest support group for women and men abused by religious and institutional authorities.

The New Zealand Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry published its final report, *Whanaketia*, in July this year. That report disclosed the enormous scale of abuse of citizens across our nation in state and faith-based care.

In particular, it revealed the predominance of abuse in New Zealand's Catholic Church, an institution found by the Commission responsible for over twice as many cases of abuse as any other faith-based institution. (*Whanaketia*, 5:1129)

As you prepare for our Government's national apology to survivors and their whānau on 12 November 2024, we request that your apology recognises that the abuse of citizens in religious settings and the covering up of this abuse is not just a church matter but a matter for the Government which has responsibility in national and international law for the protection of the health and well-being of its citizens.

We also request that your apology recognises the failure of successive governments to introduce the civil legislation needed to support citizens who are survivors of abuse and to prevent the ongoing abuse of citizens within religious institutions.



Above all, we request that your apology includes a commitment to act swiftly and with determination to establish a concrete programme of legislative reform to protect New Zealand citizens.

Therefore, in your apology, we call on you to:

1. Censure church leaders, especially those of New Zealand's Catholic Church, for failure to prevent the widespread sexual abuse of citizens as found by the Abuse in Care Inquiry.
2. Review New Zealand's diplomatic ties with The Holy See. No religious institution should be entitled to expect to hold a privileged position sanctioned by our nation's legislation and diplomatic arrangements.
3. Repeal the Roman Catholic Bishops Empowering Act 1997 which provides unreasonable financial, juridical, and administrative power to unaccountable church leaders.
4. Introduce mandatory reporting of sexual abuse including mandatory reporting by ministers of religion; and introduce new offences into our nation's Crimes Act 1961, namely: 1) concealing child abuse; and 2) failing to report child abuse.
5. Ensure that any involvement by officials of religious institutions in dealing with sexual abuse complaints be transparent; and that the processes and records of these dealings can be accessed by the judicial system with the consent of survivors.
6. Criminalise concerted efforts by persons in authority through joint planning to hide cases of sexual abuse, foil investigations into sexual abuse complaints, incentivise victims to remain silent, or prevent information relating to a sexual assault from becoming public such as by use of nondisclosure agreements or confidentiality clauses.
7. Ensure the legal system is recognised as the most appropriate forum in which to deal with church leaders perpetrating abuse and covering up abuse.
8. Support survivors in accessing the legal system, and provide the financial and legal support they need to pursue claims of sexual abuse against religious authorities, their agencies and institutions.
9. Remove fiscal benefits, charitable status, and taxation concessions from religious institutions which fail to adequately support survivors, or fail to actively prevent abuse, including those who fail to remove abusers.
10. Stop taxpayers paying through our ACC for the consequences of sexual abuses within religious institutions, and ensure religious authorities accept responsibility for ongoing payments and care of survivors.
11. Ensure the accountability of bishops and other senior leaders of religious institutions by establishing in law that the relationship between senior religious leaders and their ministers of religion is an employment relationship.



In short, Mr. Luxon, given the findings of the Abuse in Care Inquiry, it is the appointed time for our Government to step up and act resolutely to protect our children and vulnerable people from predatory religious ministers, and other religious persons, and those who shield them.

Sir, if our Government will not act to do this, then it would be difficult for us to accept your apology. As you know, a sincere apology requires restitution for the harm done and assurances that it will not happen again.

Therefore, we ask you to ensure the sincerity of your apology by following up swiftly with making the changes needed to heal and protect our citizens through concrete measures as stated above.

Thank you. Ngā mihi,

Sincerely / Nāhaku noa,

SNAP Aotearoa