



## **Domestic Violence – Victims’ Protection Bill Justice and Electoral Committee**

### **The Salvation Army New Zealand Fiji and Tonga Territory Submission**

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. The Salvation Army is an international Christian and social services organisation that has worked in New Zealand for over one hundred and thirty years. The Army provides a wide-range of practical social, community and faith-based services, particularly for those who are suffering, facing injustice or those who have been forgotten and marginalised by mainstream society.
2. The Army provides a range of social services and support programmes at over 60 community ministries and church centres throughout New Zealand. We do not provide crisis support, counselling and accommodation to victims of domestic violence, as do agencies such as Women’s Refuge. However the Army is involved in providing subsequent support to victims through our social services and to a lesser extent our accommodation, budgeting and addiction services. It is this subsequent engagement along with a shared concern for the levels of violence within our homes and communities which motivates this submission.
3. This submission has been prepared by the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit of The Salvation Army. This Unit works towards the eradication of poverty by encouraging policies and practices that strengthen the social framework of New Zealand.
4. This submission has been approved by Colonel Willis Howe Chief Secretary of The Salvation Army’s New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory.

#### **THE SALVATION ARMY’S OVERALL RESPONSE TO THE BILL**

5. The Salvation Army unreservedly supports the Domestic Violence – Victims’ Rights Protection Bill and in particular its focus on the rights and specifically the employment rights of victims of such violence. Behind this ostensive intent of the Bill, there is, most likely, a more subtle one of making domestic violence a more public matter – in this case in the workplaces of New Zealand. The Army also supports this further intent or subsequent outcome of this Bill.

#### **A FOCUS ON RIGHTS**

6. Part 2 of the Bill in essence focuses on the rights of victims of domestic violence – in this case their rights under employment and human rights legislation. The Salvation Army considers that such a rights focus is important and overdue as it extends the experiences and needs of domestic violence victims into everyday life. By doing so it offers victims additional

protections. Such an extension also reduces the risk that victims are to some extent re-victimised by systems which create further difficulties and barriers for them as they attempt to deal with their stress and trauma and hopefully rebuild their lives.

## **A FOCUS ON WORKPLACE ISSUES**

7. Critics of this Bill may argue that it is seeking to pass a social responsibility onto employers when in almost all circumstances they have not contributed to the problem of violence within families and households. It seems likely however that most employers are responsive to the personal needs of their employees and will be additionally concerned about the needs of staff who are suffering from the physical, emotional and perhaps even the financial trauma caused by domestic violence. This being the case, the Bill can be seen as enshrining a practice and a shared set of beliefs that we have developed as New Zealanders around the needs to care for victims of violence and to explicitly work at making domestic violence a more public issue.
  
8. The Bill's focus on health and safety issues in Part 3 is in The Salvation Army's opinion justified and necessary. The stress and perhaps trauma associated with domestic violence is bound to be transferred into the workplace and in doing so may contribute to the workplace being less safe for those engaged there. It is important to recognise this risk formally in health and safety legislation and Part 3 of the Bill appropriately does this.

## **POSSIBLE LONGER-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF THE BILL**

9. As suggested above there may be longer-term beneficial consequences from this Bill if it is passed. Where victims of domestic violence feel confident enough to ask their employer for the concessions offered for example in clause 7 (flexible working hours for victims of domestic violence) and in Part 4 (domestic violence leave) they are unlikely to do so trivially. Taking such a step of course not only signals a request for assistance from each victim doing so, but also makes the background violence a notable event to the employer and perhaps to close workmates of the victim. Such notice allows others to offer support and will we believe contribute in turn to all of us being more responsive and hopefully more understanding of domestic violence in our community. The Salvation Army believes that such a development is worthwhile and provides further reason for members of the Committee and their Parliamentary colleagues to support the Bill.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Salvation Army encourages members of the Committee to support the Domestic Violence – Victims' Rights Bill in its entirety. The Army believes that this Bill represents a modest but still important step to empowering victims of domestic violence to come forward and identify the background offending for what it is. Such identification continues to change the narrative around domestic violence and makes it a shared issue and so a more public one. The 'Its not OK' campaign has done an admirable job in highlighting the hidden nature of domestic violence in our culture. While this campaign has perhaps changed attitudes toward such offending and reduced tolerance of it, there is still much to be done if levels of violence in our homes are to be reduced. The Army

believes that this Bill will contribute to such a reduction and we urge you to support it for this reason.

The Salvation Army does not wish to make a verbal submission in support of this written submission and thanks the Committee for its consideration of our views.

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