


KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE SECTION 22 COMMITTEE MEETINGS

 **REMEMBER:** These consultations are your opportunity to speak boldly and respectfully to challenge the CRL's renewed push to regulate religion.

Use your own words. Ask tough questions. Demand answers and scrutinise the answers given. Point out inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Let them hear that we are many, and we are watching.

UNCONSTITUTIONAL

- Since the right to religious freedom applies equally to all faiths, why is the CRL targeting only the Christian faith for investigation? Does this not amount to bias and unfair discrimination against other faiths?
- The CRL's mandate for this Committee is, in part, to "Develop strategies to deal with and curb spiritual transgressions". Who decides what a "spiritual transgression" is—and on what constitutional basis?
- The CRL's mandate for this committee is to "Make recommendations for a legal and/or legislated framework to promote peer review mechanisms in the religious sector." Why are you taking action to implement the very thing that Parliament did not approve when this was previously debated?
- The CRL refers to its previous Report on the Commercialisation of Religion and the Abuse of People's Belief Systems" as the basis for forming this Committee. This report also said that Peer Review Committees would determine what qualifies as "acceptable doctrine" and the CRL would be the "final arbiter of religion" with the "final decision powers" in religious disputes. How is this not a violation of the Section 15 right to freedom of religion?
- Since my right to form or join an association is voluntary, if my church is forced to join a government-approved umbrella body, how does this not breach my right to freedom of association (Section 18)?
- Section 31 protects the right of religious communities to manage their own affairs. Why is the State trying to take that right away?

UNNECESSARY

- What problem is this process trying to solve that current laws cannot already address?
- Why is the CRL not using its existing powers under Section 5 of the CRL Act to investigate concerns and recommend action to remedy any problems it uncovers? Why is it looking for more power?
- Since criminal and other laws apply equally to all people in our society, why are the police and the courts not the right response if someone in or associated with a church commits a crime?

- Should we not be focusing on properly enforcing existing laws—like those for sexual abuse and fraud—instead of creating new layers of bureaucracy that will not solve the problem?
- What evidence is there that the peer review system of regulation being proposed will prevent abuse, rather than just create more red tape?

✗ UNWORKABLE

- Who decides what qualifies someone to be a “religious practitioner”? Would Sunday school teachers, worship leaders, small group leaders, ministry team or volunteers all need licenses?
- If a Peer Review Committee disagrees with my doctrinal beliefs, does that mean I lose the right to lead my congregation?
- With thousands of denominations and theological views, how will the State or a State-appointed Peer Review Committee determine which ones are “valid”?
- What happens if religious leaders refuse to comply—will they be fined, jailed, or banned from ministry?
- Since this current process is clearly driven by the CRL, how can it be called “independent self-regulation”?

💎 UNAFFORDABLE

- Who is going to pay the massive costs to build and run this licensing system?
- If religious practitioners are required to pay annual fees, how will poorer churches survive? And if they do not—or cannot—pay, will they be shut down?
- The CRL’s budget is a fraction of what this proposed system to vet, register, license and control the religious sector will cost. The Government does not have a budget surplus—and if it did, it is highly unlikely that this will be a top priority. Where will the extra money come from to finance this?
- Have cost-benefit studies been done to show whether this system will achieve anything that current structures do not already provide?
- Why should the religious sector be taxed or charged in any way to exercise rights already guaranteed by the Constitution?