

12 November 2024

By Email

The Right Honourable Mr Christopher Luxon
Prime Minister of New Zealand
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160
New Zealand

By email: Christopher.Luxon@parliament.govt.nz

Dear Prime Minister and Members of Parliament

Immediate action needed to address concerns for the health and safety of wāhine and tamariki residing in Gloriavale Christian Community

- 1 The Auckland Women Lawyers' Association (**AWLA**) writes to express concerns about ongoing abuse within the Gloriavale Christian Community (**Gloriavale**) in respect of recent findings of the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, *Pilgram & Ors v The Attorney-General & Ors*,¹ and the criminal prosecutions resulting from the Police's ongoing inquiry, Operation Mathius.
- 2 AWLA is a representative charitable organisation and its constitution sets out the following relevant objectives:
 - (a) to make suggestions and work for the reform of the law and the administration of the law particularly as it affects women and children; and
 - (b) to work for the advancement of women.
- 3 In December 2023, the Government abandoned the Cabinet-mandated joint agency response to work on several key welfare outcomes for members of Gloriavale (**Joint Agency Response**). AWLA firmly believes this decision is troubling and endangers the health and safety of those living within Gloriavale, particularly wāhine and tamariki. The failure to renew the Joint Agency Response effectively removes one of the few protection mechanisms for a highly vulnerable group of New Zealanders.
- 4 The Joint Agency Response was tasked with reviewing and ensuring progress in the following areas:
 - (a) guaranteeing that Gloriavale members can work without the threat of penalty and receive at least minimum legal employment entitlements;

¹ [2023] NZEmpC 105 [13 July 2023].

- (b) protecting the rights of tamariki by ensuring they receive an appropriate education and are not exploited for commercial gain;
 - (c) establishing a zero-tolerance policy for any form of serious harm, including physical, emotional, and psychological abuse; and
 - (d) ensuring that members who wish to leave Gloriavale can do so freely, without coercion or fear of retribution.
- 5 Former members of Gloriavale report extensive sexual, physical, financial, and psychological abuse, particularly perpetrated against wāhine and tamariki. This abuse is evidenced in the number of criminal prosecutions against members of Gloriavale's leadership, court judgments, and most recently, the findings of the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry.
- 6 Physical and sexual abuse is used to control and instil fear, while exploitative labour practices trap wāhine and tamariki in a cycle of subjugation and vulnerability. Forced marriages strip women of autonomy and subject them to lifelong harm. The presence of sexual offenders in leadership positions perpetuates a deeply patriarchal and oppressive system that enables exploitation and violence whilst silencing victims.
- 7 Given the severity of these issues, AWLA believes that addressing the abuse and neglect occurring within Gloriavale requires the Government's immediate action to reinstate the Joint Agency Response and remove Gloriavale's charity status.
- 8 Ultimately, AWLA firmly urge the Government to investigate mechanisms to disestablish Gloriavale's existence. The action required is precedented in the forced closure of the Centrepoint Community in Albany, Auckland in 2000 after leaders were convicted of sexual abuse and drug related crimes. The trust owning Centrepoint's property was disestablished by the High Court with all assets placed under administration.
- 9 There are stark similarities between the oppressive and exploitative practices within these communities and with leadership committing sexual offences towards vulnerable members of its community, including young children. It is unconscionable that Gloriavale continues to operate as a religious community in Aotearoa New Zealand given the extent of the abuse its members are subjected to is widely known.
- 10 Gloriavale's net assets were reported as being worth \$46,868,000 in July 2023.² If Gloriavale was to be disestablished, assets remaining after debt repayment should be apportioned directly into funding support systems and social infrastructure to integrate members into society.
- 11 Further, AWLA supports the recommendations of the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry:
 - (a) Tūtohi | Recommendation 3: Public acknowledgments and apologies for historical abuse and neglect in the care of faith-based institutions should be made to survivors,

² The Christian Church Community Trust annual return dated 31 July 2024 (<https://register.charities.govt.nz/Charity/CC25088>).

their whānau and support networks by the most senior leaders of all faith-based institutions, in particular ... the Overseeing Shepherd should make a public apology and acknowledgment for the abuse and neglect in the care of Gloriavale Christian Community; and

(b) Tūtohi | Recommendation 88: The government should take all practical steps to ensure the ongoing safety of children, young people, and adults in care at Gloriavale.

12 AWLA urges the Government to take immediate action and make a stand against the exploitation, oppression and abuse being perpetuated in Gloriavale. AWLA welcomes any opportunity to discuss any matters raised in this letter.

Nāku noa, nā

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