



**AUSTRALIAN BAR ASSOCIATION
and
LAW COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

MEDIA RELEASE

14 February 2015

**Personal attacks on Human Rights Commissioner
alarming say the legal profession's leaders**

The attacks on Professor Gillian Triggs and the Australian Human Rights Commission following the release of the Report "*The Forgotten Children*", are alarming, according to Fiona McLeod SC, President of the Australian Bar Association and Duncan McConnel, President of the Law Council of Australia. The leaders of Australia's two peak bodies representing all Australian lawyers have taken the unusual step of issuing a joint statement because of the unprecedented attack on the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission for carrying out her statutory duties.

"Professor Triggs has a distinguished career in the law and is highly respected. She was the Dean of Sydney Law School and has lectured and written extensively in international law and human rights. Personal criticism directed at her or at any judicial or quasi-judicial officer fulfilling the duties of public office as required by law is an attack upon the independence and integrity of the Commission and undermines confidence in our system of justice and human rights protection" said Ms McLeod.

"Those who are critical of Professor Triggs and the Commission need only stop and read the Report to see that it is concerned with detention practices of both the current and former government. The Report has welcomed the reduction in numbers of children in detention under this government, said Ms McLeod. "

Mr McConnel added "What is being lost in the commentary is the undeniable fact that the detention of children in immigration detention has been physically and mentally harmful to them. The detailed examination of the issues by the Commission provides government with information upon which it can develop responses aimed at minimising, and hopefully eliminating, the harm caused to children being held in immigration detention. The Law Council is willing to offer any assistance it can in developing practical, achievable reforms to the law that will improve the situation"

"The Australian Bar Association and Law Council of Australia agree that personal attacks deflect attention from the very serious findings of the Report and place an individual office holder under significant pressure - we cannot tolerate our public officials and institutions being subjected to this barrage for fulfilling their statutory duties. To do so is to compromise the integrity of those institutions charged with holding the government to account" said Ms McLeod and Mr McConnel in a joint statement.

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