



MEDIA RELEASE

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RE: AMENDED 'GENDER EQUALITY BILL' VICTORY FOR CHRISTIANS

'FOR SA' (Freedom of Religion South Africa), an organisation pioneered by Cape Town church leader Andrew Selley, this week succeeded in persuading Parliament to amend the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill, so as to exclude churches and public benefit organisations from the application of the Act.

"This is a huge victory for freedom of religion, and ultimately for the Church in South Africa", said Selley. "Had the Bill not been amended, we would have undoubtedly seen a new persecution of Christians in South Africa as the church would have been muzzled from believing, teaching and practicing the teachings of Holy Scripture".

"We are pro women and pro the general intent of the Bill. Our concern however was that the Bill in its original form severely threatened freedom of religion and freedom of religious expression," he added.

Selley explained that had churches not been excluded from the Bill, the Bill would have effectively outlawed scriptures such as that the husband is the head of the home (Ephesians 5:23) and that Pastors who teach these scriptures could potentially have been found guilty of a criminal offence, punishable by a fine or five years' imprisonment.

For other churches (including the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant churches) who believe that governance of the Church is reserved for men (according to their interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12), the Bill in its unamended form would have forced those churches to abandon their doctrine and to ensure that women make up at least 50% of their eldership (or governmental body) in the church. Failure to comply could have also led to criminal conviction.

"Whether Christians hold to these specific beliefs or not, must not create dissension within us. The victory is that we have stopped government interfering in the sacred beliefs of religious communities, and have in this upheld freedom of belief/religion and freedom of speech," added Selley.

Selley explained that had churches not been excluded from the application of the Bill, the Bill would have made the State rather than the Holy Bible, the highest authority on the roles of men and women in the church, and indirectly also in the home. This would have set a frightening precedent for legislation allowing the State to interfere in the autonomy of the church, and which autonomy has always been recognised as integral to the constitutional right to religious freedom.

In a media statement by ACDP MP Cheryllyn Dudley, the ACDP welcomed the amendments to the Bill and said that the potential harm which could have resulted from this legislation is now significantly reduced. Dudley further congratulated FOR SA, JASA and Cause for Justice who called for the amendment of the Bill, so as to exclude churches and religious / charitable organisations, and who articulated concerns regarding the undermining of religious freedom as a constitutional right in South Africa.

The final Bill will be debated before the National Assembly on Friday, 28 February 2014.

Selley appealed to Christians in South Africa. "Thank God for this victory and continue to pray for our country. Spread the good news. If we work together in unity and with God on our side, we can make a difference. We will have many more such battles this year, but praise God, we have won this one."

Contact FOR SA at speakup.za@gmail.com

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Released on behalf of FOR SA by Pauline Sayers.

For Further Information Contact:

Pauline Sayers | 082 568 5117

Media Liaison | 021-5574667

pressoffice@forsa.org.za | www.forsa.org.za

Notes to Editors:

- As an organisation and as Christians, FOR SA is for women, and believes that the dignity, value and capabilities of women equal that of their male counterparts and are therefore equally worthy of respect, protection and promotion. The fact that women are equal to men in God's sight (both being image-bearers of God) and are therefore equally worthy of respect by all persons as by the State, does not however mean that women and men are the same, or that their God-given roles within the family and the church, are the same.
- FOR SA (Freedom of Religion in South Africa) is a forum of different Churches in South Africa and is currently in the process of being registered and established as a non-profit company. Recently, the forum was able to rally the signed support of Church leaders representing 12 million citizens on another issue relating to religious freedom. The mandate of FOR SA is to be a voice for freedom of religion and (religious) expression in South Africa, at national level. The organisation can be contacted at speakup.za@gmail.com Contact FOR SA at speakup.za@gmail.com