

13 December 2015

CLARIFICATION REGARDING CARDINAL GEORGE PELL'S APPLICATION TO ROYAL COMMISSION – Spokesperson for Cardinal Pell, Rome.

It has become important to clarify some points around the reporting of Cardinal Pell's ill health and his unsuccessful application on Friday to give evidence to the Royal Commission by video link.

1. Cardinal Pell's lawyers tendered evidence from his doctors that it is not safe for him to undertake long haul flights at this time. The Royal Commission reviewed this medical evidence and accepted it as grounds for deferring Cardinal Pell's attendance until February. The Commission also required this personal information to be treated as confidential. Reports referring to "alleged illness" or casting doubt on the authenticity of the evidence of Cardinal Pell's long-standing heart condition are misleading and mischievous.
2. Some reports have claimed that that Cardinal Pell is too sick to give evidence. In fact, his doctors have advised him only that it is unsafe to undertake long haul flights. As a consequence a trip to attend a speaking event in Florida in January has also been cancelled. Otherwise he continues to be able to carry out his duties in the Vatican and to undertake a normal day's activities. His health issues do not preclude him giving evidence by video link, and Cardinal Pell did not wish to delay his evidence or the work of the Royal Commission. This is why he applied for permission to attend the hearing by video link on Friday.
3. Cardinal Pell has not been "ordered" to give evidence in February. In his judgment on the application yesterday, Justice McClellan quoted from a letter Cardinal Pell wrote to him last May volunteering to give evidence to the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission accepted Cardinal Pell's offer to give evidence in person and asked him to do so this month. The Commission has now asked him to attend in February in Ballarat, subject to the Cardinal's health improving. The full and correct details of Justice McClellan's decision are available on Friday's transcript on the Royal Commission website.
4. Claims that Cardinal Pell is refusing to attend the Royal Commission or to face victims of sexual abuse are false and ridiculous. Cardinal Pell's whole career is a story of stepping up to meet challenges, not avoiding them. He is committed to assisting the Royal Commission in its work, has given evidence on two previous occasions, and is determined to give evidence in the Ballarat and Melbourne case studies. He has often met with victims of sexual abuse to listen to them and to help them in whatever way he can. Above all, he wants to do everything that he can to assist survivors in finding justice and healing, and understands the importance of his evidence for them.

ENDS