

Government inertia all too apparent

18 August 2016

This week the Royal Commission issued a rare statement on the question of a public hearing into the sexual abuse of children in immigration detention centres.

Commissioner Peter McClellan made the comments in response to recent media reports which detailed hundreds of allegations of abuse on Nauru. He said the Royal Commission has an ongoing investigation in relation to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's response to allegations of child sexual abuse in detention centres and that whether or not a public hearing is warranted has not been determined.

It beggars belief that as the country's longest running, most expensive Royal Commission was underway into the sexual abuse of children in institutions, both major parties sanctioned the detention of children and young people in circumstances that were far from safe, especially for vulnerable people.

It's hard not to see the situation on Nauru as another example of the inertia of governments to deal with glaring issues of abuse.

And this is not the only example of government inertia. The Federal Government has had the Royal Commission's final report calling for a national redress scheme since September last year, and we've heard nothing, unless you call a commitment to look at the recommendations a response. Meanwhile, victims and survivors live day-to-day with the uncertainty and disadvantage that so often shadows the lives of people living with the impact of childhood abuse.

On a brighter note, last Friday I was in Perth where I had interesting conversations with Catholic Education Office executives, principals and interested personnel. Later this week I will visit a parish in Hunter's Hill in Sydney to hear from the local community there.

As I travel around the country talking to people, I am encouraged by the grit and determination shown by the people at the coalface of what is our Catholic Church. People in our schools, social services, in parishes and in other ministries. They can hear what the Royal Commission is saying. And they are getting on with the job of addressing the issues in their own backyard.

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