

Statement by the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Dr Phillip Aspinall  
Friday 22 August, 2003

I am making this statement today regarding distressing, damaging and false allegations about me that have been circulating, one for more than a year and a half, and another more recently.

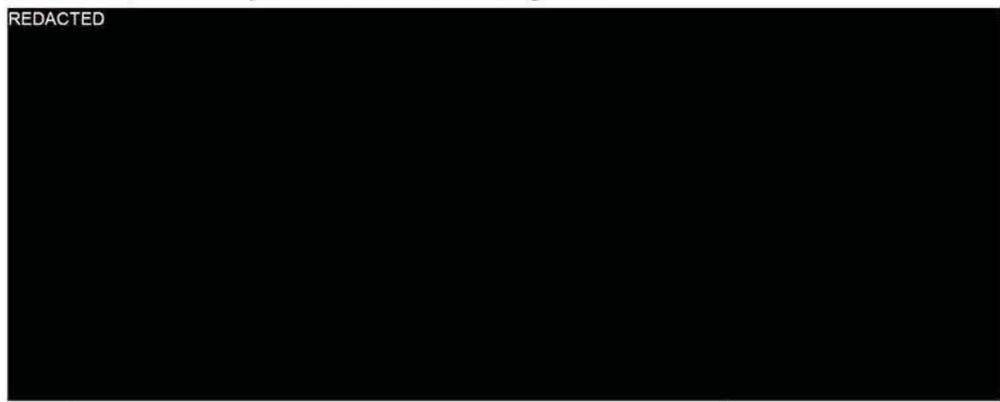
From the start, may I say the allegations are as false as they are serious. May I also acknowledge my trepidation that in raising these false allegations, there is a real danger of creating a story when, for the reasons I am about to give, there should be no story.

However, I must reject these allegations and defend my innocence.

The situation, simply put, is this

- A person contacted me just after I had become Brisbane's Anglican Archbishop alleging he was sexually abused by a priest in Tasmania over 20 years ago. He alleged that I had arranged for him to share the bed of the priest who subsequently abused him.
- I absolutely and totally rejected this allegation then, as I do now. Independent witnesses also reject the allegation.
- At the time of the alleged assault by the priest, the person who contacted me and I were both young adults and both Church youth group leaders.
- I was 22 and he was 18. I was not a priest.
- Both of us were part of a group of adult friends who were staying overnight at the accused person's house.
- I absolutely and totally reject the assertion that I arranged for this person to share the accused person's bed. There was no suggestion of any untoward behaviour until this allegation surfaced over 20 years later.
- As soon as the alleged victim raised the matter with me I advised him to report the matter to the Police and to the Church authorities in Tasmania. Shortly after, he told me that he had done so.
- I also contacted the Bishop of Tasmania myself to ensure that counselling and support was offered to the person. I provided what support I could myself. Even though I rejected his account as false, I insisted that the alleged victim should tell the truth as he saw it and told him that I would do no less myself.
- Let me be clear. This person's primary allegation is not against me but against someone else. The complainant's accusations against this other person came before a Tasmanian Church Tribunal last year. I gave evidence. I cannot detail the evidence that was given. I stress, I was a witness before the tribunal, not the subject of the tribunal's investigation.

REDACTED



Any reporting which respects the truth and the principle of fair comment should record:

- That the allegations against me are false
- Independent witnesses exist who reject the first allegation
- I am told this allegation was given to the Tasmanian police some 18 months or so ago – they have not contacted me.
- I strongly urged this man to report his allegation both to the Tasmanian Police and the Tasmanian Church authorities. And he confirmed, shortly after, that he had done so.

- I interceded to secure counselling for him. I respected his wishes and his emotional instability and said nothing publicly.
- I acted as was appropriate given my public statements and personal commitments on how the church should deal with allegations of sexual abuse or assault.
- I reacted the way I would expect other members of Brisbane diocese – and indeed other people in leadership positions – to act.

I am making this statement now because it seems inevitable that a story based on these false allegations will be run.

I am also conscious that the man making these false allegations was recently the subject of a published story. I have been very mindful of the fact that, until now, he has not wanted contact with the media. I have respected that.

I am aware that he is wounded, angry and deeply hurt. He needs and deserves our compassion and support.

However, the allegations concerning me are false and I must say that.

I do not suggest that the publication of these false allegations about me is warranted, even if accompanied by my strong rejections. On the contrary, my reason for speaking today is to openly and publicly disclose why they should not be publicised. In conveying my rejection to you, I am constrained by the law about what I can say about the matter and the identity of the persons involved. Within those constraints, I want to emphasise that the allegations concerning me are false, and are contradicted by independent witnesses.

A further word of caution needs to be sounded. If media outlets decide that truth and public interest are served by running a story about these false allegations, I feel obliged to make you aware of what the man said in a recent letter to Tasmania's Bishop John Harrower. In part, he said:

“... there was the debacle of [a person] giving my name and phone number to journalists from a number of places who then made contact with me on a number of occasions. Each time it was a miracle that I survived. The first phone call came when I was on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor of an apartment building, when I was already suicidal. The ... journalist's call was the last straw that almost sent me over the edge literally.”

I have respected his welfare and that is an important consideration.

I remain as determined as ever to deal with matters of sexual abuse thoroughly and properly and I will not be diverted from that course, even by false allegations against me.

I cannot speculate as to why someone would make these false allegations. I can only state the truth – that the allegations are false and that I will defend my innocence.

These matters may well be the subject of legal proceedings in Tasmania and I will do nothing to interfere with due process. For that reason I am constrained not to say anything beyond this statement.

The media will need to consider its position in relation to the laws of contempt and the identification of the complainant and the defendant in those proceedings.

Copies of this statement will now be made available to you.

Thank you for your attendance.