

Statement

Name George Gregory Aghajanian
Address 1 – 5 Solent Circuit Baulkham Hills, New South Wale
Occupation General Manager
Date 29th September 2014

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. I make this statement on the basis that letters patent from Her Excellency the Governor of New South Wales declared section 17 Royal Commission Act 1923 (NSW) to apply, and section 6 DD of the Royal Commission Act 1902 (Cth) applies to any document I produce or answer I give to any question to the Royal Commission.
3. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those which were used, to the best of my recollection.
4. My full name is George Gregory Aghajanian. My date of birth is 13th June 1960.
5. I am the General Manager of Hillsong Church Limited (**Hillsong**). I was appointed to this role, then described as Business Manager of Hills Christian Life Centre (**HCLC**) in October 1994. I am a director of Hillsong and in my capacity as General Manager responsible for the administrative, governance and operational affairs of Hillsong.

Response to allegations of child sexual abuse made against Frank Houston

6. In late October 1999, I had a telephone call put through to me from Pastor Bill Johnston (**Bill**), now deceased. Bill told me that the call was about some matters related to Pastor Frank Houston (**Frank**) father of Senior Pastor Brian Houston (**Brian**) which Bill considered were beyond his responsibility as head of the Pastoral Care area.
7. The call was from a person known as 'Mad Dog' Mudford (**Mr Mudford**). Mr Mudford said he had been speaking at a church meeting in Western Sydney. At the end of the church meeting, Mr Mudford presided over an altar call at which a lady said to him that Frank Houston (**Frank**) had abused her son some 30 years prior when Frank was a visiting Pastor from New Zealand. Mr Mudford felt that no-one was doing anything about it and suggested there was a cover-up. I said that

was not so, that we had never heard of any such allegations and advised him that we would investigate the matter.

8. On the same day I attended my weekly management meeting with Brian. It was our regular Tuesday catch up and we were the only two persons at the meeting. It was at this time that I informed Brian of the allegation against Frank. I said to Brian "we have received a phone call from a person called Mad Dog Mudford who has said that at a meeting he held recently, a woman told him that your father Frank had abused her son around 30 years ago".
9. When I told Brian this, he was visibly shocked. He said words to the effect of "I know nothing about this and I'll have to investigate it. Frank is currently overseas but I will meet with him upon his return".
10. Brian arranged a meeting with Frank upon his return from an overseas trip in November 1999 and put the child sexual abuse allegation to him. My understanding from Brian is that Frank admitted that the allegation was true. I believe that at that meeting Frank also identified the person who had been abused as [AHA] (AHA Allegation).
11. I was subsequently informed by Brian that as a result of the meeting with Frank, Brian took the following actions regarding the [AHA] Allegation:
 - a. The matter was referred to the Assemblies of God (AOG) now known as the Australian Christian Churches (ACC) for investigation;
 - b. Frank's credentials to undertake ministry were immediately suspended;
 - c. A meeting of the AOG National Executive was convened which I understand took place on 22 December 1999.
12. A Special Elders Meeting (a meeting of the then Board) of Sydney Christian Life Centre (SCLC) was convened on the 29th of November 2000 to discuss the issues relating to the [AHA] Allegation which I attended. At this meeting, Brian shared details of the investigations carried out by the AOG and the New Zealand Assemblies of God in New Zealand (AOGNZ) into allegations against Frank. The Board accepted Frank's resignation and a decision was made to make an announcement to the church concerning his retirement.
13. I am aware from my role as General Manager that Frank was not allowed to preach, have any public ministry or attend Hillsong again.

Other complaints regarding Frank.

14. I am also aware from my role that there were other allegations of child sexual abuse made against Frank to the ACC and the AOGNZ. I do not have direct knowledge of these allegations.

Relationship of action taken to policies and procedures of Hillsong and ACC

15. Hillsong's approach in dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse has been consistent over the years but has become more formalised as reflected in our documentation. The existing policies and procedures have been developed through ongoing consultation with various professionals and regulatory authorities. From the earliest of days, Hillsong's approach has included the involvement of our senior management. Staff and volunteers are required to make a report to their immediate oversight. This oversight or department head will escalate the matter to either the Senior Pastor or me as the General Manager. There will then be a decision made about the further handling of the allegation including whether or not it should be reported to Family And Community Services (**FACS**) (formerly known as the Department of Community Services (**DOCS**)) and/or the Police. Our senior management are responsible for these decisions. If necessary, legal advice is taken. All substantiated allegations and individuals with known convictions results in the person being asked not to attend Hillsong Church or related activities. If the allegations are historical or not confirmed sufficiently to ask the person to leave Hillsong, the person against whom they are made may become a Person of Interest (**POI**) in which case information will be disseminated about the person to key pastoral staff so that he or she can be monitored. In the case of an allegation against a staff member, we would notify the ACC if they were a pastor and report the matter to FACS and/or police depending on the facts arising from our investigation. With the advent of new legislation in NSW, Hillsong is now also required to report to the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian.
16. The **AHA** Allegation was dealt with the way it was for several reasons:
- a. this matter related to a situation that occurred over 30 years ago while Frank was still a pastor in New Zealand and did not involve SCLC, HCLC or Hillsong;
 - b. the matter was immediately referred to the AOG for investigation;
 - c. it was felt more appropriate that the matter was handled by our denomination due to the personal relationship of Frank to Brian;

Relationship of Hillsong to Australian Christian Churches previously known as Assemblies of God in Australia.

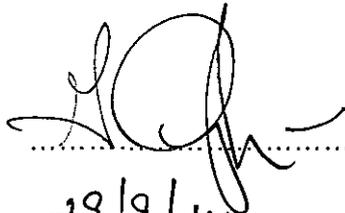
17. The Australian Christian Churches (**ACC**) is a movement of independent Pentecostal churches who voluntarily choose to associate and cooperate. ACC is an unincorporated association, ABN 58123514361. This movement commenced in Australia in 1937. It was then known as the Assemblies of God in Australia (**AOG**). AOG changed its name to ACC in 2007.
18. Hillsong is an associated member church of the ACC. Hillsong remains self-governing as a separately incorporated legal entity. However it commits to work together with other churches in the movement for the purpose of mutual support and the spread of the Gospel in Australia and in the world.
19. The ACC has a limited oversight of Hillsong as an associated church. Its oversight primarily relates to the registration of Hillsong as an associated church, managing

ordination applications, accreditation of its pastors and investigation of grievances against credentialed ministers. As an associated church Hillsong retains complete responsibility for local governance. The ACC has no authority to direct Hillsong board of directors regarding its local governance, other than through moral persuasion and provision of models of policy governance. For example, Hillsong's policies practices and procedures for the prevention, detection and reporting of allegations of Child Sexual Abuse was prepared independently of the ACC.

Policies practices and procedures within Hillsong for prevention, detection and reporting of allegations of Child Sexual Abuse

20. Hillsong's detailed procedures for the prevention, detection and reporting of allegations of child sexual abuse are set out in the Hillsong SAFE Policy and Procedure Manual at Vol. 4, 4.9 to 4.22 [HIL.0001.004.0139; HIL.0001.004.0121; HIL.0001.004.0133; HIL.0001.004.0136; HIL.0001.004.0117; HIL.0001.004.0143; HIL.0001.004.0147; HIL.0001.004.0150; HIL.0001.004.0152; HIL.0001.004.0155; HIL.0001.004.0158; HIL.0001.004.0161; HIL.0001.004.0166; HIL.0001.004.0172]; this is supplemented by Vol. 3, 3.2 [HIL.0001.003.0009] March 2013.
21. In particular, the procedure for handling disclosures of child sexual abuse, including the escalation of the report to senior management, is set out at Vol. 4, 4.15 [HIL.0001.004.0147].

Signed:



Date:

29/9/14

Witness:



Date:

29/9/14