Statement

Name          Brian Charles Houston
Address       1 - 5 Solent Circuit Baulkham Hills, New South Wales
Occupation    Minister of Religion
Date          28 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 the letter patent from Her Excellency the Governor General
do not exclude section 6 DD of the Royal Commission Act 1902 (Cth) as it
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 Brian Charles Houston. My date of birth is 17 February 1954.

5. I am the Senior Pastor of Hillsong Church Limited (Hillsong) along with my wife
Roberta Lee (Bobbie) Houston. We have been the Senior Pastors of Hillsong,
previously known as Hills Christian Life Centre (Hills CLC), since its
establishment in 1983.

Structure and Ministries of Hillsong

6. Hillsong is an independent Christian Church. Its first service was held in August
1983. It was originally known as Hills CLC until 2001 when it formally adopted the
name Hillsong Church. From 1983 to 1997 it met in various hired premises. It
moved into its current site at 1 - 5 Solent Circuit Baulkham Hills, which is within
the Norwest Business Park (Norwest Site) in 1997 and has met there ever
since.

7. Hillsong is incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee (ACN 002 745 879)
and is governed by a Board of Directors. In my capacity as Senior Pastor, I
oversee the overall objectives of Hillsong. The senior management report to me.
The two key functions of senior management are 'pastoral' functions and
'operational' functions. Joel A'Beall, Lead Pastor, is responsible for the pastoral
functions within Hillsong. George Aghajanian, General Manager, is responsible
for the operational functions such as finance, information technology and human
resources. In turn, various operational managers and teams report to Pastor A'bell and Mr Aghajanian.

8. Today, Hillsong has a number of churches across Australia and in eleven other countries, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States of America.

9. Each weekend over 11,000 people attend the Norwest site with a total of around 35,000 congregants attending church across Hillsong campuses Australia-wide.

10. Hillsong and its associated entities carry out a wide range of ministries, community initiatives and social justice programs that operates separately or in conjunction with other ministries. These include:

   a. Hillsong International Leadership College. The College attracts local and international students. It trains, equips and builds leaders in pastoral, worship and other ministry skills. Enrolments for 2014 include over 1600 full time students and many part-time and night college attendees. The College offers fully accredited Vocational Education Training in ministry, music and worship including courses in the arts and television production.

   b. Hillsong holds three major conferences each year; Hillsong Conference, Colour Your World Women's Conference and Hillsong Men's Conference. These conferences are attended by people and church leaders from all denominations, both local and international.

   c. Hillsong City Care, Hillsong's community care arm, is a church-based, not for profit organisation that exists to serve the community by offering help to people in need and empowering them to move beyond their point of crisis. Programs include a health centre, emergency relief services, drug and alcohol programs, practical assistance to refugees and personal development and recovery courses.

   d. Disaster Relief initiatives which provide assistance during natural disasters such as bush fires, earthquakes, floods and tsunamis on a global basis.

   e. 180TC, a ministry that assists young men overcome drug addiction.

   f. A21 which is combatting human trafficking and modern day slavery.

   g. Vision Rescue, which provides food and non-formal education programs in Mumbai and Calcutta India. It transitions vulnerable children from the slums into formal education giving them an opportunity for a better future.

   h. Hillsong Africa Foundation works in some of the most vulnerable communities in Cape Town South Africa. It provides services and support through a model of inclusive community development.
Structure of Australian Christian Churches (Previously Assemblies of God in Australia) and Relationship to Hillsong

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. In the ACC, voluntary cooperation is expressed in terms of equality, as self-contained and autonomous Christian churches, uniting for evangelism, unity, fellowship, order, discipline and other purposes. ACC has over 1070 associated churches and over 272,000 congregants.

14. ACC is governed by a National Executive. The National Executive is elected by the National Conference, held biennially. The National Executive comprises persons residing in different locations around Australia.

15. The ACC National Conference is recognised as the governing body of the movement, with power to make whatever decisions may be necessary or advisable in the interests of the work of ACC as a whole. Hillsong is represented at the National Conference as one of the associated churches with its credentialed ministers.

16. Whilst the ACC is a national movement, it provides for administration of some matters at a state level. To facilitate this, each state has its own Conference, State Executive and elected executive officers. Some functions are delegated to the State Executive.

17. 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.

18. I was the National President of AOG and then ACC from 1997 to 2009.
Sydney Christian Life Centre and its Relationship to Hillsong

19. Sydney Christian Life Centre (Sydney CLC) was founded in 1977 as an independent Church by my late Father, William Francis “Frank” Houston (Frank). Sydney CLC was located variously in Double Bay, Darlinghurst and lastly Waterloo. Frank founded Sydney CLC and was its Senior Pastor until 10 May 1999 when he stepped down to take on an itinerant preacher role as he transitioned into retirement.

20. I was appointed as the Senior Pastor of Sydney CLC from 10 May 1999.

21. In 2001, following a transition period, Hills CLC (the church that I founded) was formerly renamed Hillsong Church and Sydney CLC adopted that name to become Hillsong's City Campus.

22. Until 10 May 1999 there was no connection between Sydney CLC and Hills CLC except that both churches were members of ACC.

23. Sydney CLC was a member church of AOG from about 1978 or 1979.

Initial Allegations against Frank Houston of Child Sexual Abuse

24. In about late October 1999 I had a conversation with the General Manager of Hillsong, George Aghajanian (George) at the end of a weekly administration meeting. George informed me of an allegation that had been received from a third party about my father Frank Houston.

25. The details as recounted to me by George were that someone had telephoned the church office and spoke to one of our pastors, the late Bill Johnston. The call was then put through to George. The caller indicated that Frank had abused a minor many years ago and claimed that no-one was doing anything about it. It was alleged that the abuse occurred in Australia around 30 years before when Frank was a visiting Pastor from New Zealand.

26. The person calling was known as ‘Mad Dog’ Mudford. He was a Christian evangelist. He had been speaking at a church in Western Sydney and had publically shared about his own abuse. At the end of the meeting, he had an altar call and a lady said to him that Frank abused her son over 30 years ago. The abused person was identified as Allegation.

27. The Allegation was the first allegation of child sexual abuse or any other allegation of this type against Frank that I had ever been aware of. I was deeply shocked both because Frank is my Father and because of the surprise and freshness to me of the allegations.
28. Frank was overseas at the time I was informed of the Allegation, but I determined to confront Frank upon his return.

Meeting with Frank Houston in November 1999

29. Within a day or two of Frank arriving home, in about early November 1999, I arranged to meet with him at my office (November 1999 meeting). I put the Allegation to him. Frank admitted to me that the Allegation was true, and that the name of the person was .

30. I recall meeting and his family in about 1971 when I was aged 17 and I visited Australia with Frank. I also recall coming back to Sydney in 1974 with Frank and staying in his family home in Coogee. I did not sleep in the same room as Frank. I recall that's parents' names were and At that time, Frank was living in New Zealand and was visiting Sydney on ministry. My recollection was that I thought he was a few years younger than me, possibly 12 or 13 when I was 19.

31. In about the time that the Allegation became known to me and I confronted Frank, I was aware that Frank was in the early stages of dementia. I am also aware that his memory deteriorated very quickly because of dementia after 2000.

32. After his admissions, Frank indicated to me that he had been approached directly by regarding the allegations. I am not sure how had made contact with Frank. I was not told the details of how and when this occurred. Frank said that at 's request he had met him at Redfern Railway Station and paid him $2000 which had asked for. I understand that Frank later made other payments to totalling $12,000. I understand that a document was signed in relation to the payments and I recall seeing the document. This was the first time I had been informed as to the existence of payments and the signed document. I am unable to locate a copy of the document, I am not aware of its terms, I have not been able to confirm whether in fact there is one in existence now, and I don't remember exactly what it did say. What I remember is wanting to be sure it didn't involve any request to keep the matter quiet and didn't prohibit from informing the police. In other words, I wanted to be sure it couldn't be seen as "hush money". It was probably along the lines that this payment was final. I only remember sighting this document. I was not involved in writing it and the reason I saw it was because I was involved as Frank's son.

33. At the November 1999 meeting I indicated to Frank that his credentials as a minister were immediately suspended and that I would need to take it to the National Executive of the AOG.

Actions following meeting with Frank Houston in November 1999

34. I immediately informed the individual directors of Hillsong of the Allegation, the admissions made by Frank in my meeting with him, and that Frank's
credentials were suspended. Frank never preached or ministered again at Hillsong after this meeting.

35. As President of the AOG, I convened an emergency meeting of the National Executive of the AOG. The meeting took place at a room in Sydney Airport on 22 December 1999. I informed the National Executive of the AHA Allegation against Frank and that Frank had admitted to me that it was true. It was a very difficult and emotional time for me. The Executive agreed at that meeting that I should be removed from dealing with this matter including the issue of Frank's ministry credentials because of my relationship with Frank. The AOG National Executive made the decision to revoke Frank's credentials. Frank was never again allowed to preach or engage in public ministry at Hillsong or anywhere else.

I made various announcements across the 12 month period after November 1999 to the Board, staff, to our leaders and at various public church services across our Norwest and Sydney City Campuses. I can't give exact dates but it was over the months that followed the abuses coming to light and the ensuing investigation by the Executive of AOG. No two of these announcements were exactly the same, they were not written statements, but the recurring theme was that there were victims, people were damaged, and on most occasions, that it involved minors. This includes in one of my sermons during a major event at the Hillsong Conference in 2000.

36. From December 1999, the investigation of the AHA complaints was handled by the AOG without my involvement.

Phone call with AHA

37. The exception to this was that I rang AHA once to follow him up pastorally after I heard of the AHA Allegation, sometime in the weeks immediately after it had come to light. I remember I was standing in my garden when I had the conversation. I think I had a conversation with AHA's mother, AHA first who gave me AHA's phone number.

38. I made the call as much because the abuse suffered by AHA was committed by my father as I did because I was President of the Australian AOG. At the time I estimated that AHA was probably about thirty-five to forty years of age. I was compassionate and genuinely heartbroken regarding my father's conduct and the suffering experienced by AHA. During this phone call AHA did not give particulars of the abuse except to suggest that "whatever Frank had told me had happened, it was probably worse", AHA said "no matter what Frank's version is, it was bad", AHA said "I don't want to go public about the abuse or go to the Police.

39. I offered AHA the opportunity to get counselling and asked how else I could help him. He said "I just want to be believed, for you to know it was bad and that is the end of it as far as I am concerned. I don't want my identity to become public".
40. This is the only time I spoke to AHA personally. It was at my instigation but he was a willing participant in the conversation.

41. I believed that it was the prerogative of AHA to make a report to the police if he wished, since he is an adult. I did not dissuade AHA from making a report to the police.

42. I have not heard from AHA again.

43. Barbara Taylor (Barbara), who I thought was REDACTED though I have since been informed whilst preparing this statement is in fact a pastor of an AOG church in Western Sydney for years. I did not know her well, just as a fellow pastor in the AOG over many years. She came to see me within a few months after the AHA disclosure. She was initially angry and conveyed her disbelief that I had never heard of rumours about Frank in New Zealand which she had apparently heard when she was visiting New Zealand. I received an email from Barbara a few years later, on an unrelated matter. In that letter she said AHA is doing well' and that 'he has come back to the Lord and is attending a church on the Central Coast'.

Other Allegations against Frank Houston of Child Sexual Abuse

44. Within about twelve months after finding out about the AHA Allegation, I received a telephone call from the Assemblies of God in New Zealand who informed me that there was another complainant regarding Frank who was in Sydney and who wanted to meet with me. I met with him in Sydney CBD and had a coffee with him. He told me that when he was 14 years of age, prior to 1977, in New Zealand, Frank had abused him. He had chosen to become a psychologist because of the abuse. I do not now recall his name.

45. From 2000 onwards, I heard other stories and allegations about Frank relating to conduct before he moved to Australia in 1977. This included rumours of other cases of child sexual abuse in New Zealand. Prior to this time I had not been aware of any of these abuse allegations. The only thing I do recall was that some years ago my sister told me that someone had alleged to her that Frank was a homosexual. However, there was no mention of any child sexual abuse. There was never any substantiation of the rumours.

46. To my knowledge no complaints regarding child abuse by Frank have been made that relates to conduct that took place since the establishment of Hillsong, or that was alleged to have taken place after 1977. Frank was always adamant that there was no more child abuse after he moved to Australia in 1977.

47. Frank died in 2004.

Hillsong's Child Protection Policies and Procedures
48. Hillsong has in place comprehensive written child protection policies which have been developed and continually reviewed over its many years of operation. Copies of these policies have been provided to the Royal Commission. Any allegation of alleged misconduct is taken seriously from the beginning.

49. As the Senior Pastor of Hillsong, I am committed to the proper practical implementation of these policies and the regular review and updating of them. Underpinning all these policies and practices is a principle of zero tolerance for abuse. In particular, Hillsong does not allow any persons who have convictions or findings against them of child sexual abuse to attend any of Hillsong’s activities.

Signed: [Signature]
Date: 28/09/14
Witness: [Signature]
Date: 28/09/14