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## Rabbinical leaders to be called to royal commission into child sexual abuse

Jane Lee and Richard Baker September 11, 2014

Senior rabbinical leaders will be called to give evidence to a royal commission about alleged cover-ups of historic sexual abuse against children.

The royal commission into child sexual abuse began inviting Jewish victim-survivors to tell their stories in recent weeks, publishing advertisements in the *Australian Jewish News*.

"Anyone who experienced child sexual abuse while in the care of a Jewish institution, such as a school, youth program or sporting club, and wishes to share their story, can make contact with the royal commission," the advertisement says.

Fairfax Media has been told that senior rabbis will also be called to give evidence in Australia's first national investigation into child sexual abuse in Jewish schools and other organisations.

This comes as the NSW Ombudsman, NSW Police and Victoria Police continue to investigate senior rabbis' failure to report allegations of child sexual abuse at the Yeshivah centres in Melbourne and Sydney to authorities.

The president of the Organisation of Rabbis of Australasia, Rabbi Meir Shlomo Klugant, said he did not know of any rabbis who had been called to the royal commission.

Rabbi Klugant said it was clear that child sexual abuse had occurred "within certain organisations in our community".

"I expect that it will be found that there have been instances in the past where this issue was not dealt with appropriately, or that attempts were made to cover it up, for a wide range of reasons which the royal commission will explore," he said. "What is important is the extensive efforts that have been, and continue to be made, to ensure that children are safe and mistakes of the past are not repeated.

"I would strongly encourage victims to share their stories with the commission and advise all those who will be asked to give evidence to be open and honest in their testimony and to be entirely supportive of the process."

All organisations working with or caring for children needed to "learn from the past and change their policies and practices. It will bode well for all to make the best out of this opportunity."

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has so

far focused on Catholic clergy abuse, which makes up the bulk of historical child abuse reports. Leading Catholic Church figures, including Cardinal George Pell, have previously been asked to explain how the church handled abuse complaints internally through its Melbourne Response and Towards Healing schemes.

Manny Waks, chief executive of Jewish victims support group Tzedek, said victims continued to claim that they and their families had, like him, been bullied and intimidated when they reported abuse.

Mr Waks, who was also abused, said that victims had not yet been offered any personal apologies or compensation from senior Jewish figures.

"If that is not going to happen voluntarily then the royal commission is a perfect opportunity to examine closely what has happened to hold those to account where that is appropriate," he said.

The Jewish community was "decades behind" the Catholic community in terms of the number of victims coming forward, he said.

Convictions of sex offenders have in recent years raised questions about the way senior Jewish leaders, particularly in the orthodox Jewish community, have acted on abuse allegations.

David Cyprys, a leader of a youth group at the Yeshivah Centre, was convicted of a series of rapes against a 15-year-old boy last year. Rabbi Abraham Glick, the principal at the time of most of the offences, said at the time he was aware of rumours of Cyprys' offending in the early 2000s.

Daniel Hayman received a suspended sentence in Sydney in June after pleading guilty to aggravated indecent assault of a boy, 14, at a Yeshiva-run youth camp where he worked in the late 1980s.

"While we've gotten to the core of specific incidents of abuse, we have not gotten to the core of the factors that allowed the cover-ups and abuse to go on for so long," Mr Waks said. "Too many people have hidden behind this veil of piety. That will need to change. There is no excuse for the cover-ups that took place."

A spokesman for the royal commission said he could not confirm or deny whether senior rabbis would be called to give evidence. Public hearings were only announced about four weeks in advance, with witnesses generally revealed on the day.

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