

## **Leaders need to step up on redress**

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With the announcement this week that the Federal Government will set up a Royal Commission to look into the abuse of young people in the Northern Territory juvenile detention system, we yet again see the national government, in theory, step up to protect young people.

Just over three and a half years ago the Federal Government, under Julia Gillard, established the child abuse Royal Commission – many would say a long overdue move.

What is now just as long overdue is the Federal Government's response to the first final recommendation of the Royal Commission – the establishment of a national redress scheme.

Rhetoric aside, the government has not delivered even one threshold decision towards an operative redress scheme for all victims of institutional child sexual abuse. Prime Minister Turnbull, a public advocate for victims of child abuse, has not even said whether the Commonwealth will provide redress for those abused in Commonwealth agencies.

More to the point, the Commonwealth officials seem hell-bent on shifting any substantial efforts on establishing a scheme to the states and territories, whom in turn are wary at best to be dragged into a program where the Commonwealth sits on its hands but wants to lap up any political capital in the process.

From the very outset the Catholic Church has said that an independent umpire is needed to establish redress for victims. The credibility of the Church and all other institutions is too far gone to have any other alternative.

Victims groups, academics and survivor organisations are at one calling for a national redress scheme. The Royal Commissioners see the obvious sense in such a scheme. The major churches, private organisations and even the legal fraternity support national redress. The outrage so powerfully present in the Commission's case studies echoes the need to act swiftly, fairly and generously.

Yet the political class stays mute and hopes that their inertia will wear everyone else down.

Needless to say that it is just the type of disengagement from elected politicians that has lead our system close to a gridlock. If an issue isn't hot in the polls then it doesn't get attention. If the public voices are not loud enough, or important enough, then too bad.

Leaders need to get out in front and challenge the moral sentiment of the time. The voices of those who have suffered are calling us all to step up. Can our politicians follow?

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