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## **Media Release**

### **“Liberty Victoria says Australians should be alert and alarmed at police powers to censor the internet”**

Liberty Victoria expresses its alarm about the introduction of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Crime or Terrorism Related Content) Bill 2007. Introduced by Federal Communications Minister Helen Coonan, this Bill allows the Australian Federal Police to decide what Australians can see on the internet.

The Bill gives power to the Commissioner of the AFP, or a Deputy Commissioner or senior executive AFP employee under delegation, to give Internet service providers a written notice to prevent end-users from accessing internet content believed to be crime or terrorism related content.

According to Julian Burnside QC, President of Liberty Victoria, “this Bill is deeply disturbing. It comes on top of earlier attempts by the Federal Government to censor books and film which were subsequently found not to incite violence or breach seditious laws. The pattern emerging with this incremental censorship is incompatible with the values of free speech and democratic ideals”.

According to the Federal Government these new laws will allow harmful sites to be more quickly added to software filters rendering them inaccessible to the public. “But who is to decide what is harmful”, said Julian Burnside QC. “Earlier Government assessments were overturned by the classification board. Even more troubling, this latest attempt establishes the AFP as the arbiters of what the public can view”.

“There is no monopoly on the correct way to live or beliefs to hold. Banning unpopular views or stigmatising dissenters may fuel dissent rather than counter the threat of terrorism. Actions, not voices, books or pictures, should be rendered criminal. It is better to hear what others think than persecute them for their beliefs and opinions”, said Julian Burnside QC.

“Allowing police to decide what we see and view constitutes a dangerous erosion of civil liberties and is corrosive to the democratic ideal. Australians must voice their opposition to this Bill”.

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