

# **AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES**

**GPO Box 2281 Brisbane Qld 4001**

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## **MEDIA RELEASE BY TERRY O'GORMAN** **PRESIDENT, AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES**

The Israel Falou controversy and recent moves by the Australian Rugby League Commission to suspend players accused of sexual assault even before their criminal charges are determined by a Court shows the need for major Australian sporting organisations and their sponsors to sign up to minimum international human rights standards.

Australian Council for Civil Liberties President Terry O'Gorman said that recent international developments in this area especially the launch of the Centre for Sport and Human Rights in June 2018 shows how Australia is seriously behind in recent international developments in dealing with human rights issues in major sporting events involving powerful commercial sponsors.

"The Centre for Sport and Human Rights established in June 2018 was set up as a partnership between the Mega-Sporting Events platform for Human Rights and the Institute for Human Rights and Business. It involves major international sponsors such as Adidas and Coca-Cola and is chaired by former Republic of Ireland President Mary Robinson," Mr O'Gorman said.

Mr O'Gorman said that major Australian football codes such as Rugby Australia and the Australian Rugby League Commission need to entirely revamp their procedures in relation to players rights to freedom of expression and adherence to basic due process rights such as the presumption of innocence when a player is charged but not convicted of a criminal offence.

Israel Falou's social posts about fornicators and homosexuals whilst objectionable to many Australians nevertheless represents Falou's religious views and he should be completely free to express them.

"It might be a different matter if Falou's posts about fornicators, etc were directed specifically to his fellow team members. The cohesion and compatibility of the team may have to take precedence over free speech issues in that scenario," Mr O'Gorman said.

“But clearly, Falou’s comments were not directed at his fellow team members. They are an expression of his fundamentalist religious views to which he is absolutely entitled,” Mr O’Gorman said.

“Moves in recent months for senior Australian rugby league players to be prevented from playing in tournaments while awaiting trial for sexual assault charges represents as serious an affront to human rights in major sport as Falou’s imminent suspension from Rugby Australia,” Mr O’Gorman said.

Mr O’Gorman said that both Rugby Australia and the Australian Rugby League Commission need to catch up with recent international sport human rights developments and follow the leadership of the International Centre for Sport and Human Rights which strongly pushes for the retention not the weakening or even abolition of basic human rights standards for participants in major national sporting bodies.”

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