

Exclusive Brethren Church rejects Four Corners witch hunt

The leader of the Exclusive Brethren Church, Mr Bruce D Hales, has categorically denied a series of allegations to be aired on ABC TV's *Four Corners* program tonight.

Mr Hales said the unsubstantiated allegations, leaked to some other news outlets ahead of the broadcast, are further examples of the unjustifiable harassment by sections of the media and disaffected former Brethren members, which the Brethren has been subjected to in recent months.

"The Church feels it is being persecuted because of its beliefs," Mr Hales said this afternoon.

"Suggestions by *Four Corners* that there is a coordinated campaign by the Exclusive Brethren Church to spirit large sums of cash around the world in breach of Australian laws are completely false," he said.

"There is no illegality and there is no evidence of illegality. *Four Corners* has built its case purely on the basis of assertion and conjecture.

"Some Brethren carry gifts of cash to distribute to persons engaged in furthering the work of the Lord and none of this money is gifted for or related to political campaigns. This money is always well within Australian foreign currency limits.

Mr Hales said that Brethren members are committed to being decent, law abiding and contributing citizens of Australia who are being subjected to undeservedly hostile media scrutiny. Any breach of the law is regarded as a misdemeanor and our teachings are regulated according to Scripture to keep the laws of the land.

"We believe we have a right to live our lives and practice our Christian beliefs without persecution," he said.

"We are particularly dismayed when, without substantiated evidence, we are falsely accused of wrong doing. This is trial by gossip and guilt by rumour and innuendo, provided by uninformed, biased and unreliable sources. It is no more than a witch hunt."

Further information: Phil McNaughton 0409 002 830