

Calls to legalise polygamy in Australia rejected

Calls from two Islamic leaders to legalise polygamous marriages in Australia have been rejected by the government.

Citing polygamy as against the law, Attorney-General Robert McLelland told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC): 'There is absolutely no way that the government will recognise polygamist relationships. They are unlawful and they will remain as such.'

Islamic Friendship Association of Australia's Keysar Trad had said that polygamy exist in Australia and the government should legalise it to protect the rights of women.

Trad had told a Triple J radio programme that polygamists in Australia's Muslim community would like their relationships to be legalised as otherwise women were left in a vulnerable position in the case of the man's demise.

'If this woman has wilfully chosen to enter into this relationship and makes a lifelong commitment to this person to be married, it shouldn't matter. If it was a business and the business had four partners we'd recognise that, but why don't we recognise it when it comes to consensual relationships amongst adults?' Trad said.

Trad, who's mother was a third wife in a polygamous marriage overseas, said women admired, respected and supported each other in such relationships.

Polygamy is illegal in Australia and those practising it feel they are not accepted by society.

Sheikh Khalil Chami of the Islamic Welfare Centre in the Sydney suburb of Lakemba said on the radio show that he was asked to perform polygamous religious ceremonies on a regular basis and while he declined, other sheikhs did not.

'If you know, there is law that will help you, there is community that will help you. Why not? Why not change the law? Not an open door but in a way everyone will have control. It's a bit hard, very difficult, but unless we face it, how (do) we overcome it?' Chami asked.

Neena Bhandari (© IANS / India eNews)