

Witness Name: Sina Dubbelman

Statement: WITN1438001

Exhibits:

Dated: 8 September 2022

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SINA DUBBELMAN

I, Sina Dubbelman, will say as follows: –

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Sina Dubbelman. I am 50 years old, and I am a mother of three adults. I work in business administration, and I enjoy my job.
- 1.2 I am a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW).

2. STATEMENT PURPOSE

- 2.1 I need to share my experience with the Royal Commission to shine the light on faith-based child abuse – to encourage more people to come forward and to help the children who do not have a voice.
- 2.2 I would also like to see the JW organisation held accountable for the historic abuse of children in their care and for the abusive processes they are responsible for.
- 2.3 I would like to help expose the JW for the way they deal with child abuse allegations in their congregations.

- 2.4 The JW is a cult and people need to understand the way this cult brainwashes and makes its members feel guilty and fearful of leaving.
- 2.5 I would like to help inform the public of the fact that, even to this day, they let known sex offenders inside the congregations where there are families with children.
- 2.6 I am sharing my experiences with the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care for my own healing and to inspire others within their State and faith-based communities to speak up about abuse and corruption.
- 2.7 Being involved in this process, I am empowering myself and hope to inspire others to do the same.

3. MY EARLY YEARS

- 3.1 My mum, [GRO-B], was from Apia and came to New Zealand when she was about 21 years old.
- 3.2 My dad, [GRO-B], was from Feilding and was a [GRO-B] in Masterton. Mum and dad met years after both their previous relationships had ended.
- 3.3 As early as I remember, my mother went to the congregation meetings. She was studying with them. My father went occasionally for a while, then went more in my teenage years. I believe he went for my mum. My brother [GRO-B] and I lived at home. He is 10 years older than me. But we were close.
- 3.4 In our early life we grew up out of town as dad had a small sheep farm. I guess you could say I was brought up in the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation.
- 3.5 I was allowed to attend a public primary school and had "worldly friends" to see after school. But this stopped once my mum was baptised in the JW. I was around six or seven years old. We were only allowed to associate outside of school with other Jehovah's Witnesses.
- 3.6 I was incredibly lucky to have my best friend, [GRO-B]. She was more like a sister to me. Her mum and my mum were close as they both came from Samoa.
- 3.7 When my brother got older, he stopped going to meetings. So, a lot of the time it was just mum and I going. Mum and I went out, as they say, "witnessing," door-knocking from door to door most Saturdays.

3.8 When I was three months old, my mum and dad started selling GRO-B. They got to the stage that once a year they would go overseas for about 10 to 14 days. At first, I was looked after by a couple of mum's family members – GRO-B my cousin, and I think my auntie (mum's youngest sister) – as well as a lady (I cannot remember her name now). But my mum was very bossy, so I do not think the family members stayed too long.

4. LIFE AS A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

4.1 I suppose I knew no better as it was all I had ever known. As a young child, I accepted the reasons why we did not celebrate birthdays and Christmas. To make it easier for me, I made sure that my school friends knew I was a Jehovah's Witness. So, whenever I had to knock on their door, they were not shocked.

4.2 I was fortunate because my dad was not one while I was at school. While I was at intermediate, he let me go to the socials. Mum was not happy about it though. I was not allowed to play sports on the weekends, as extracurricular activities were frowned upon.

4.3 I suppose I would say that there were missed opportunities brought on by being a child in the JW organisation. My mum, I would say, was a devoted JW. We did have times we did a lot all together as a congregation. It was also hard too, as we lived about 10 to 15 minutes from Masterton, out in the country. So, it was lonely as my parents worked long hours as I got older.

4.4 Teenage years were not easy all the time. But you made the most of it. I got baptised when I was just 16 I think. At that stage I was seeing a guy who was not a JW but used to go to the meetings with his sister and his niece and nephews. My mum did not like him at all.

4.5 I moved out of home into a little flat next door to my boyfriend. Then a few months later I had a car accident. When I was in hospital, mum got an elder to come with her and have a personal chat with me and bring the Watchtower article on not becoming unevenly yoked with an unbeliever. I was in traction, and she got the nurses to wheel my bed out into the foyer, so they could talk to me. The elder I know was uncomfortable about it, but because I was a newly dedicated baptised Witness he had an obligation to help my mum.

4.6 I fell pregnant after leaving the hospital and we ran away from Masterton to Nelson. I knew I would be disfellowshipped. My dad came to Nelson to bring me home to have the meeting with the elders.

5. MY ABUSE

- 5.1 [GRO-B-1] was the offender who sexually abused myself and, as I found out when I was a lot older, he had abused two others who I knew in the Masterton congregation. They were sisters. I know we would not have been the only ones he sexually abused. We will not be the only survivors. He was in his 60s or 70s when he abused me. I strongly suspect that he would have also abused other children when he was younger.
- 5.2 I did not recall for a long time what had happened to me when I was very young. I feel that I now only remember half of what happened, only snippets.
- 5.3 An elderly couple in the Masterton congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses were like grandparents to me. Their names were [GRO-B-2] and [GRO-B-1]. They lived in [GRO-B], a Masterton suburb. I cannot remember the exact street, but it was behind the [GRO-B] of I think [GRO-B].
- 5.4 They had a massive section with the house at the back of the property. I would be able to take you there if I were in Masterton.
- 5.5 My mum looked up to [GRO-B-2] as like a mother figure; she had a good standing in the congregation. [GRO-B-1] did all the [GRO-B] of the [GRO-B] at the [GRO-B] [GRO-B] (our JW church building).
- 5.6 I am unsure of my exact age when I used to go and stay with them, but I was not at school, and I did not go to kindy. Working it out, I must have been about three years old or not quite.
- 5.7 My mum and dad built up their [GRO-B] business, starting when I was three months old. They used to have to go overseas to seminars with the company for about 10 to 14 days. [GRO-B-2] was very strict. Their house was a big old villa. Most of the house was not used. They never used the front door. When you went to their place, you went around the back, which was covered in, and on the left, there was a room that [GRO-B-1] used as his study. We had to walk past the laundry to get to it. When you went inside the back door, on your left was a sunroom which [GRO-B-2] had converted to her bedroom. On the right was the toilet and next to it the bathroom.

- 5.8 I recall walking through into the kitchen and small dining room. To the left was the small lounge with a small TV and [GRO-B-2] spinning wheel. By the small lounge was a door that was always shut.
- 5.9 The other two bedrooms and the big lounge were down that part of the house. The spare bedroom was first on the right and on the right was the big lounge. [GRO-B-1] bedroom was on the left. It was the big room in the front of the house opposite the big lounge which was never used – only maybe once in a blue moon.
- 5.10 The spare room that I stayed in had high ceilings with two beds and a wooden wardrobe in it.
- 5.11 My brain has shut out most of the sexual abuse trauma that I was subject to while I was in [GRO-B-2] and [GRO-B-1] care, excluding a few pervasive snippets of memory. [GRO-B-1] used to make me masturbate him and as I did this, he used to tell me, “Don’t let any boy put it in your vagina.”
- 5.12 He often did this if [GRO-B-2] went out. I do not think [GRO-B-2] knew what he used to do to me. I often wanted to play at the school playground over the fence. But [GRO-B-1] only allowed me to do this “if I was a good little girl.” Which meant doing something sexual for him.
- 5.13 He used to also rub his penis on the outside of my vagina too. When I was at school, I think by then maybe about five years old (I really cannot remember the exact age) he would sometimes perform oral sex on me. He said that if I got tingling in my tummy that meant that I liked it, and it was a good thing.
- 5.14 He constantly said to me that it was just our little secret and I was to tell no one otherwise I would never be allowed to play in the school playground ever again.
- 5.15 [GRO-B-1] would often come into my room when [GRO-B-2] had gone to bed and kiss me inappropriately, he used to smell of garlic as they ate garlic every day. He would fiddle with my vagina. I used to try and blank it all out at the time.
- 5.16 From an early age I was being made to be sexual and to feel complicit in my own abuse.
- 5.17 We used to also take [GRO-B-2] and [GRO-B-1] over to the Upper Hutt town hall as this is where the JW cult used to have what they called circuit assemblies. This is when all the congregations around the district would come together for two

- days and have talks et cetera. We would travel from Masterton and pick them up. Often it was cold, and we would have a blanket across our knees up to our middle. GRO-B-1 if I was sitting next to him, would fiddle with me over my knickers under the blanket. I always felt uncomfortable.
- 5.18 I remember one year when I was around six years old, waking up after the trip. We got back home, and I was on the floor of the back of the car, curled up in a foetal position. My mum woke me up and said, "What on earth are you doing on the floor curled up in a ball?" At that stage I had not remembered my abuse and I said to her I felt funny.
- 5.19 I think it was in intermediate that I must have said something to make my mum talk to GRO-B-1. I remember we went for lunch at their place, and after lunch Mum wanted to talk to GRO-B-1 privately.
- 5.20 That day I remember GRO-B-2 was different and almost softer and kinder. Then when my parents went away again, I stayed with another couple, GRO-B and GRO-B, and their older daughter GRO-B. I loved staying with them. They were what it was meant to be like to stay with normal people.
- 5.21 I did not go to the elders about my sexual abuse from GRO-B-1. As I had attempted to block it out of my mind, I had told no one when I was young. Not until later, when I was older, and I had remembered some of what happened, as I did not remember it all at once. I now struggle to remember the exact timing and sequence of my disclosures.
- 5.22 I did not say anything to the elders until GRO-B-1 had died. It was having to put up with the sexual harassment later in my teens that triggered the start of my memories. This happened over about a year. I was sexually harassed only twice but it was so traumatic as it brought on the start of me recalling my earlier abuse.
- 5.23 When I was about 13 years old, I was friends with GRO-B-3. She was married to GRO-B-4. His dad, GRO-B-5, was an elder in the Masterton congregation.
- 5.24 I loved spending time with GRO-B-3, and we would often be together. When GRO-B-3 GRO-B-4 moved to Carterton they had a farm. I would sometimes stay the night.
- 5.25 GRO-B-3 often had migraines, and sometimes GRO-B-4 and I would have to go from Carterton to Masterton for the JW meeting without her.

- 5.26 I had a funny sense about GRO-B-4, but I would shrug it off. I used to help on the farm and a couple of times GRO-B-4 sexually abused me. The first time it happened it seemed like just an accident. I thought it was a mistake. He put his hand on my thigh when driving home from the Kingdom Hall and then said, "Aww sorry."
- 5.27 The next time I was on the farm 4-wheeler, and he said, "No I'll open the gate you drive." So, I did, and he hopped on the back after closing the gate and put his hands around my waist and put his hands on my breasts over the top of my clothes. Then he said, "Aww it's so cold."
- 5.28 The second time was the last straw. I never stayed out on the farm again after this happened. GRO-B-3 asked if I wanted to come out to the farm and help with the shearing, I think it was. I said yes, I did not want to but thought GRO-B-3 at least would be there, but she was not, she just brought lunch out to us.
- 5.29 I do not remember a lot of the detail, but when we had finished the day, GRO-B-4 said that his shoulder was sore and asked me to just massage it. I had been feeling uncomfortable the entire day. He had his clothes on and I just rubbed it a bit and stopped. I think I said, GRO-B-3 will be able to do it." Then he said, "Here your back must be sore too, I'll rub it." And I said, "No it's OK." He said, "Don't be silly, just lay on the bale on your tummy." I did, and he rubbed my shoulder and then I thought he had stopped. I was about to get up off the bale and he lay on top of me. I just froze. I did not know what to do. I went like ice. It was so uncomfortable it felt like forever, and I just wanted to disappear.
- 5.30 GRO-B-4 got off me and said, "I am sorry." Then nothing was said, and I had tea with them and that was the last time I stayed. When I used to stay out there, the spare room that myself and visitors would stay in, was just out from the kitchen. The dressing table with a mirror was just inside the door. GRO-B-4 and GRO-B-3 room was over the other side of the house. But the bedroom door did not shut properly, and you always felt like someone was watching you. I was not the only one that had that experience when they stayed with them.

6. JEHOVAH'S WITNESS JUDICIAL PROCESS

The two-witness rule

- 6.1 I told my cousin what happened with the sexual harassment and one of the elders in the congregation, [GRO-B-6] found out. He told my mum that I had to talk to [GRO-B-4] about it. I said that was not going to happen. But mum had got [GRO-B-4] to come out to our house and we all sat down in the lounge. I was so uncomfortable. Mum asked me what I wanted to say. I was meant to tell [GRO-B-4] what I experienced. But I was so shocked and felt so uncomfortable I said nothing.
- 6.2 Mum said to [GRO-B-4], "Do you want to say anything?" [GRO-B-4] then said, "I am sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable or anything," and, "I believe nothing has happened at all." Then my mum said, "Aww well, that's that then." Mum thanked [GRO-B-4] for coming out and he left. My mum would have gone and told [GRO-B-6] that it was all sorted and that it was just a misunderstanding.
- 6.3 No one came and asked me how I was, and I was left feeling not believed. So, they never followed up because they believed [GRO-B-4] and my mum believed him too. That is what they do when it is the two-witness rule.
- 6.4 The way they treated my situation with [GRO-B-4] is outlined in a section of the JW book "Organized to Accomplish our Ministry." This section is headed "Not overlooking serious wrongs," which states:

NOT OVERLOOKING SERIOUS WRONGS

Willingness to overlook offenses and to forgive does not mean that we are not concerned about wrongdoing or that we approve of it. Not all wrongs can simply be charged to inherited imperfection; nor is it for our brother's good or for the good of the congregation to overlook it if he commits wrongs that go beyond minor offenses. (Lev. 19:17; Ps. 141:5) Under the Law covenant given through Moses there was recognition of a difference in degree of seriousness of sins and transgressions. This is also true for Christians under the new covenant. – Compare 1 John 5:16, 17.

When giving counsel, Jesus outlined some specific procedures for resolving problems of serious wrongdoing, such as fraud or slander, that may arise between fellow Christians. Note the steps that he set out: "Moreover, if your brother commits a sin, [1] go lay bare his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, [2] take along with you one or two more, in order that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. If he does not listen to them, [3] speak to the congregation. If he does not listen even

to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector.” – Matt. 18:15-17.

- 6.5 But the JW cult also takes this on board with abuse cases – and accusations of sexual harassment – even though they say they do not.

No support person when in the judicial meeting

- 6.6 You are not allowed to take a support or witness with you into a judicial committee meeting with the elders. You sit with three elders in front of you. You must tell them of your serious wrongdoing.

Reinstatement of “sinners” after disfellowshipping

- 6.7 GRO-B-5, the elder I mentioned, who was on my judicial committee meeting years later, was exposed by his daughter: GRO-B GRO-B-4 sister. She accused GRO-B-5 her dad, of sexual abuse. He was disfellowshipped but never stopped going to the meetings and eventually he was reinstated back into the Masterton congregation. This was wrong, the elders never went to the authorities at all.
- 6.8 In the JW organisation, if a person shows that he has repented or believes he did not do the crime, they will reinstate that person after a period.
- 6.9 Then you are encouraged to welcome them back into the fold. By the sinner being shunned from the so-called loving congregation, that is his punishment.

7. SHUNNED

- 7.1 Being disfellowshipped at an early age was very traumatic for me as I had lived my whole life with the support of my parents and my friends in the congregation. I did not really have any friends outside the congregations. So that is why I could not live in such a small town that I had grown up in my whole life.
- 7.2 Moving to Nelson and having nobody apart from my husband and his family was very lonely. My mum did continue to keep in contact, wrote me letters, sent me articles of the Watchtower and Awake magazines even though she was not allowed to talk to me about anything spiritual.

- 7.3 When we got married, only my dad came down and he stayed with us. When I had our son a month or so later, my mum came down to be in the hospital with me. But she would not stay at our place as I was still disfellowshipped. That was hard for me. Having a baby and going to meetings where I had to sit in the back and no one could talk to me. Only the elders were allowed to.
- 7.4 The feelings of loneliness when I was a new mother with a baby having to go and feed my baby with all the other mums in the creche that could not talk to me was horrible. I did not know anyone at all. Then there was a couple that were also disfellowshipped and we all became friends. That was great but then came “the talk” one day, as they were going to get reinstated eventually before me.
- 7.5 So, they no longer could come and visit or talk to me as they were told that they had to be acting like a JW well before they got reinstated, which meant they could not communicate with me.
- 7.6 Because I was the only one disfellowshipped, my husband was allowed to communicate with other JW as he was studying with one of the elders. So, the only contact I had was when GRO-B would come once a week and have a study with him.
- 7.7 When a friend of mine was disfellowshipped it was horrible, not being able to talk to her was horrible because I knew exactly how it felt. But because you are taught this is for their own good and it will help them come back to the congregation, you went along with it.
- 7.8 I remember the day that she called me and said she would be reinstated on Tuesday. That was awesome for me at that stage because I could spend time with her.
- 7.9 It is a barbaric way of making you so fearful of this treatment that you try your hardest not to do anything wrong.

8. EXCOMMUNICATED

- 8.1 The elders discuss the matter. There are always three elders at a meeting when they want to meet with you when you have done what they say is “serious wrongdoing”. When you meet at the Kingdom Hall you are not allowed to take a support person.

- 8.2 Even though I was under 18, because I was baptised I had to go to this meeting on my own. There were three elders ([GRO-B-5], Gerald Moore and Phil Parkinson) for my judicial meeting at the Kingdom Hall in Colombo Road, Masterton.
- 8.3 They say a prayer, they read passages from the bible (ones that speak about your wrongdoing). Then they ask you to talk about how it happened and why I was not chaperoned. One in particular, [GRO-B-5] who was older, asked me uncomfortable questions, wanting to know everything in detail. One of the other elders, Phil Parkinson, intervened. Then I was asked to leave the room.
- 8.4 I had to wait out in the hall or foyer for them to discuss what I had done – having sex before marriage – and if I showed I was sorry enough for it. It can take a while as they are discussing your fate.
- 8.5 I was called back into the room and was told I would be disfellowshipped in a week's time. They also told me that it would show remorse if I attended the meeting when they announced it. (Within the week, I left with my boyfriend to live in Nelson.)
- 8.6 The elders must come to an agreement whether you are going to be privately reprovved, publicly reprovved or disfellowshipped.
- 8.7 Privately reprovved: Only the elders are informed you have privileges taken away from you – such as giving talks on the stage, or not allowed to answer at the meetings.
- 8.8 Publicly reprovved: There is an announcement at the midweek meeting. An elder gets up to the stage and says “so and so has been publicly reprovved”. Then the meeting carries on.
- 8.9 Disfellowshipped: Is done the same way as being publicly reprovved but the elder says “so and so has been disfellowshipped”.
- 8.10 This is how the process was the whole time I was a JW. I cannot imagine much has changed.

9. IMPACT OF ABUSE

- 9.1 The impact is ongoing. Emotionally and psychologically is the worst. I not only had to deal with my sexual abuse, but also that I was left felling that it was my fault, that I had done something very wrong.

- 9.2 Then the fact that once I got older and realised that this could have been prevented by the elders in the Masterton congregation, the anger at them set in. Still to this day, even though GRO-B-1 is dead and buried, the Jehovah's Witnesses were to blame. I am not sure if I will ever get over the anger.
- 9.3 For a long time, I would bury my feelings of low self-esteem by hiding behind a bubbly persona. Trying to please everyone all the time. Never really knowing how to be myself.
- 9.4 I found when in my teens I would get sexually aroused easily. As I got older in my marriage, I needed to feel loved and to me that meant sex. It was not until years later that I realised that was not right, that you could be loved without having to have sex.
- 9.5 Smells sometimes bring snippets of memories back, but I have worked hard at blocking that out. I used to cry a lot when everyone was asleep, wondering why this had happened to me.
- 9.6 The psychological impact is still far reaching. In the JW I was made to feel like I was of a lower class than others in leadership positions, like the elders, the circuit overseers, and their wives. The circuit overseers travel around the country visiting the various JW congregations and they are meant to uplift the congregations. They are hosted only by members who have high standing in the congregation. The congregation members pay for the Circuit Overseers' petrol and expenses after their visit. To me they undeservingly placed on pedestals. That is so wrong as a lot of the congregation members financially struggle. The feeling of not being good enough to host a CO is so demoralising.
- 9.7 Another impact of JW abuse is the memory I will always have congregation families being taught to chastise and physically discipline their children. At the JW meetings children are to be quiet and are to sit and listen. I often saw parents taking their children out of meetings to physically discipline them. As a child I often experienced this myself. It is difficult for JW children because the assemblies last the entire day. Big conventions last for three days. These events cause members a lot of financial pressure through travel and preparation costs. Children are expected to sit quietly through these long meetings.

- 9.8 As a JW member you are made to feel like you are never quite good enough. Members often feel guilt. Even for questioning JW things in your mind causes anxiety.
- 9.9 JW are always reminding members not to associate with their disfellowshipped family, or “worldly people.” The consequence of doing so comes with the fear of being excommunicated. This is emotional and psychological abuse, and you realise this when you leave the JW. JW life is not a loving environment. It is a controlled environment.

10. REDRESS

- 10.1 I have never made a claim for any form of redress to ACC or to the JWs. I am currently receiving counselling and my counsellor has recently talked to me about the process of making an ACC sensitive claim.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

- 11.1 Religious organisations such as the JWs should expel all known sex offenders including those accused of such crimes on children. They should be out cast, and the congregation should be alerted to their identity and the risk these people present.
- 11.2 They should be trespassed and not allowed within the vicinity of the Kingdom Hall, just like they are not allowed near a school.
- 11.3 There should be a law requiring mandatory reporting of such matters to the appropriate government agencies.
- 11.4 There should be no name suppression, regardless of their position in society. People have a right to protect their innocent children.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

GRO-C

Signer:

Dated: 8 September 2022

GRO-C

GRO-C