



ACSJC BRIEFING

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From the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, the social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia - www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Friends,

Below are some updates on developments on some Australian social justice issues with international significance.

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

In November 2003, the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee tabled its report of the inquiry into the progress towards national reconciliation. The Report, *Reconciliation: Off track*, found the policy of 'practical reconciliation' was failing to address many aspects of Indigenous disadvantage and ignoring important symbolic aspects of the process. (refer:

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/index.htm)

Also in November, a Productivity Commission Steering Committee released a major report - *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators 2003*. This report drew together a wide range of indicators to more accurately measure the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. The Report called on all levels of government to commit to a policy review framework with priority given to action addressing early childhood development, school attendance, teenage development, substance abuse, family support, health care and economic development. (refer:

<http://.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2003>)

In February, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation launched a national Indigenous Health Rights Campaign. The Campaign seeks to raise awareness of: the third world health conditions experienced by Indigenous Australians; the causes and consequences of the Indigenous health crisis; and achievable solutions to the crisis which entail a regard for health as a human right and related to Indigenous culture and dignity. The organisers of the campaign stated that "health is a human right that is directly linked to other fundamental human rights: housing, education, employment, Indigenous rights to self-determination, enjoyment and protection of their cultures and relationships to the land." (refer: <http://.antar.org.au/>)

The ACSJC, along with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Commission and other Church and community groups, is worried about the precarious levels of Economic and Social Development experienced by Indigenous Australians and the disparities in their situation compared to the overall population. This disparity has been a focus of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People, Mr Rodolfo Stavenhagen.

Over the last three years, the SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR has paid particular attention to: evaluating the implementation of national legislation of member states in terms of how it impacts on Indigenous communities; the circumstances of Indigenous people in the administration of justice; and human rights issues regarding Indigenous children. It would seem that for Australia,

the hampered or stalled progress seen in the amended Native Title Legislation, high levels of Indigenous incarceration, and the inadequate response to the Stolen Generations coincides with the focus of the Special Rapporteur, Mr Stavenhagen.

These unresolved issues are also indicative of Australia's failure in recent times to advance the process of national reconciliation.

DETENTION OF AUSTRALIAN NATIONALS

In November 2003, the ACSJC released a position paper, *The Detention of Australian Citizens at Guantanamo Bay*. This document is available at: http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/publications/positionpapers/2003_11_28the_detention_of_australian_citizens_at_guantanamo_bay.html.

At that time, ACSJC Chairperson Bishop Christopher Saunders wrote to the Federal Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock, expressing concern about the detention of the two Australians for two years without charge, the reported conditions endured at Camp Delta, and the inferior standard of justice that would be afforded before a military commission. He urged the Australian Government to use its close ties with the US Government to negotiate an end to the detention of the Australian citizens and that, if warranted, for charges to be laid and heard before a non-military court.

The Attorney-General responded to Bishop Saunders at the end of January, reiterating the Government's position that: the two Australians cannot be prosecuted successfully in Australia; that Australians who breach the laws of foreign countries have no automatic right to be repatriated to Australia for trial; and that it believes the military commission process will be fair and transparent. The Prime Minister has since confirmed this position when responding to Opposition Leader Mark Latham's surprising proposal for retrospective laws that would allow the Australians to be prosecuted at home.

In February, the ACSJC wrote to Justice Louis Joinet, Chairperson/Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, forward-

ing a copy of the Council's position paper and stating that the basic standards contained in international laws to which both Australia and the United States are signatories have not been met.

Last year, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention considered the "deprivation of liberty of persons detained at Guantanamo Bay" in its report to the 59th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. The Working Group considered that, should a competent tribunal issue a ruling on the legal status of detainees, it would either rule in favour of a prisoner of war status which would afford detainees the rights of the Geneva Conventions or it would invalidate this status in which case the rights of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights would take over. The Working Group stated that until such time as a ruling was made, those detained in Guantanamo Bay were entitled to the guarantees of the Third Geneva Convention.

TIMOR LESTE AND THE TIMOR SEA

The next edition of the ACSJC journal, *Justice Trends*, carries an article that considers the **ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY EAST TIMOR** following its independence.

East Timor is seeking to establish permanent national maritime boundaries that would provide greater access to the resources of the Timor Sea. Its claim on oil and gas reserves has intensified as the United Nations prepares to scale down its presence from May 2004, and the Government of Timor Leste seeks a future free from over-reliance on aid funding.

Recently, Secretary General Kofi Annan urged the Security Council to extend the UN Peace Keeping mission to East Timor for another year with the aim of consolidating the country's justice, administrative and policing systems. However, a decline in development assistance and an unexpected shortfall in domestic revenues means that the establishment of a solid economic base is also a vital aspect of East Timor's development that must be addressed immediately.

On May 20 2002, Australia and East Timor signed the **TIMOR SEA TREATY**.

At the time this treaty was signed, there were divergent views about the appropriateness of the established boundaries of the shared petroleum development area, its economic value for East Timor, and Australia's mining of other fields which fall just outside the area.

East Timor would like to negotiate permanent maritime boundaries that would help secure its economic development. Under international law, East Timor and Australia could seek the independent arbitration of a special tribunal on maritime boundaries of the International Court of Justice regarding these establishment of boundaries. However, in March 2002, two months before East Timor's independence, Australia withdrew from the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the Tribunal for the Law of the Sea – removing an important avenue of appeal. East Timor has had no option but to enter bilateral negotiations with Australia.

The Government of East Timor was hoping these negotiations could occur on a monthly basis in order to resolve this issue within a period of three to five years. However, Australia is prepared to meet only twice each year. The next meeting is planned for April 2004.

East Timor is the poorest country in Asia and among the 20 poorest nations of the world.

- *John Ferguson (National Executive Officer)*

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or email: admin@acsjc.org.au)

OCCASIONAL PAPER: FROM ETHICS TO SPIRITUALITY

Catholic Social Justice Series no.49 – Fr Gerard Gleeson (cost \$6.60 plus postage)

2004 SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

The 2004 Social Justice Calendar focuses on the theme "Cultivating a Culture of Peace". This coincides with the theme for the 2004 Social Justice Sunday Statement.

Cost: \$6.60 (inc. GST), plus postage. <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/con->

[tent/publications/social_justice_calendar.html](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_calendar.html)

POSITION AND INFORMATION PAPER – DETENTION OF AUSTRALIAN CITIZENS AT GUANTANAMO BAY

Website paper available at: http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/positionpapers/2003_11_28the_detention_of_australian_citizens_at_guantanamo_bay.html

BACKGROUND PAPER – AUSTRALIA & UNITED STATES FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Available on the ACSJC website - http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/positionpapers/2003_9_5_australia_&_united_states_free_trade_agreement.html

IMPORTANT NOTICE: After five years, rising production costs have made it necessary for changes in the pricing of ACSJC publications. The Annual Subscription is now \$30. Catholic Social Justice Series papers are now \$6.60 each plus postage, with a 10% discount for purchases of 20 or more copies. Postage rates are: 1 copy \$1; 2-3 copies \$1.45; 4-5 copies \$2.45. For full list of Catholic Social Justice Series Papers visit: http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_papers.html

CURRENT ISSUES

ACSJC OCCASIONAL PAPER: "FROM ETHICS TO SPIRITUALITY"

This month, the ACSJC releases the 49th edition of the Catholic Social Justice Series. In addressing the, From Ethics to Spirituality, Fr Gerard Gleeson reflects on the links between philosophy, theology and Christian spirituality.

The theme is demonstrated through a close analysis of the familiar exhortation of the prophet Micah: we are 'to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God.' Distilling some of the key philosophical and theological

insights of the Catholic moral tradition into clear observations, he concludes that 'the bigger story is the story of salvation in Christ, of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, which alone make ethical life possible, and of the virtue of humility, which is the practical foundation of our Christian lives in which we aspire to the heights to which God is calling us.'

This addition to the Catholic Social Justice Series of papers shows us the path towards development of an interior disposition that confidently reflects the mind of Christ. Our responses must be embedded in prayer, enriched through Scripture, and nurtured in the Sacraments by means of a life in communion together.

JUSTICE FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS PAPER: "THE BETTER WAY": Justice for Asylum Seekers (JAS) is a network of around 30 Church, welfare and community-based groups, based in Victoria with some national representation also.

In March, JAS is releasing a public information document: The Better Way – refugees, detention and Australians. The document reveals that there are indeed alternatives to the current arrangements which are achievable, responsible, affordable and, most importantly, humane. The Better Way will be available on the website of the Melbourne Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace (refer: <http://.ccjdp.org>)

The document is based on a 2003 JAS Report that proposed alternative processing arrangements that were fully costed by economist Dr Tony Ward of Milbur Consulting. The report revealed that detention centres such as Baxter are nearly two thirds more expensive than medium security hostels and twice as much as community housing with case management. The Government could save around 20% of current costs if it adopted the proposed model at the same time as addressing the tragic human cost of holding children and families in unbearable conditions behind the razor wire.

MARCH NOTICES

2004 JESUIT SEMINAR SERIES during the Lenten Season: "A Fair Go in the Age of Terror", with Fr Frank Brennan AO. Fr Frank will be joined by a panel of experts in each of the following cities:

ADELAIDE, Tuesday 9 March 7.30 pm, St Ignatius Parish, Norwood;

MELBOURNE, Thursday 11 March 7.30 pm, Xavier College, Barkers Rd, Kew;

SYDNEY, Tuesday 16 March 6.30 pm, St Aloysius College, Jeffrey St, Milsons Point;

BRISBANE, Tuesday 23 March 7.30 pm, Christian Brothers College, Gregory Terrace;

CANBERRA, Thursday 25 March 7.30pm, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, 15 Blackall St, Barton;

WESTERN SYDNEY, Tuesday 30 March 7.30 pm, St Patrick's Church, Allawah St, Blacktown.

(refer:

http://.uniya.org/news/media_11feb04.html)

February 21 - March 14: SHORT PLAYS, "LET LOOSE IN ADELAIDE!". Two witty and moving short plays from the other side of the razor wire, 'Halal el Mashakel' by Linda Jaivin and 'Refugitive' by Shahin Shafaei. Three week season at the Adelaide Fringe Festival – on the campus of the Adelaide University. (refer: <http://.chilout.org/events/index.html>)

March 3: PUBLIC FORUM, "RACIAL RESPECT PUBLIC FORUM". Shadow Minister for Immigration, Mr Stephen Smith MP discusses Labor's new refugee policy. 6.00-7.30pm, Federation Room, Havelock House, 85 Northbourne Avenue, Turner, ACT – Canberra. Event sponsored by Racial Respect Inc. (refer: http://.ajustaustralia.com/whatshappening_events.php)

March 3: PUBLIC MEETING, "NEUTRALISING THE NGOS: How the Right targets NGOs". Tim Thornton from the Department of Economics at Monash University uncovers the Right's new assault on NGOs and their role in

advocacy and public debate. 6.30-9.30pm, New International Bookshop, Trades Hall, 54 Victoria St, Carlton South, Melbourne. (refer: <http://melbourne.indymedia.org/calendar>)

March 4: SENATE INQUIRY REPORT, "POVERTY AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP". The long-awaited report of the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship is due today. (refer: <http://aph.gov.au/senate/committee/inquiries/index.htm>)

March 4: PUBLIC LECTURE, "PAYING FOR SERVITUDE: TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN for prostitution in Australia". Speaker Kathleen Maltzahn is the founder of Project Respect. 8.00 – 10.00pm, Coombs Lecture Theatre, HC Coombes Building, ANU, Canberra. Free public lecture (refer: http://staff.anu.edu.au/billboard/show_event.asp?eid=1393)

March 12: PUBLIC FORUM, "ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS". Global Action to Prevent War (GAPW) Australia presents an interactive morning forum to help identify Australia's responsibility in Chairing the Human Rights Commission in Geneva and what Australia's role might be in policy and prevention to do with non-violence. 9.00am-12.30pm. Sydney. For further information and rsvp, contact the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (02) 9351 7686 (refer: <http://arts.usyd.edu.au/centres/cpacs/seminars.htm>)

March 8: PANEL DISCUSSION, "FROM AFGHANISTAN TO NAURU". Monday March 8 from 7.15pm, Manly Community Centre, 12 Wentworth St, Manly. Entry by donation (refer: <http://chilout.org/events/index.html>)

March 8: PUBLIC FORUM, "AN EVENING WITH ANDREW WILKIE". Rooty Hill Uniting Church and the Western Sydney Peace Group invite you to spend an evening with Andrew Wilkie with reflections on the year since his controversial resignation from the Office

of National Assessments. 7.15pm, Rooty Hill Uniting Church, 86 Rooty Hill Rd North, Rooty Hill. (refer: <http://chilout.org/events/index.html>)

March 8: CONFERENCE, "HUMAN RIGHTS AND MENTAL HEALTH". SAVE Australia, A Just Australia, ANTaR and the Edmund Rice Centre are convening a one day conference on human rights and mental health in the political context of contemporary Australia. Speakers include: the Hon. Dr Carmen Lawrence, Hon Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans; Ms Lillian Holt, Dr Eileen Pittaway. Cost: \$120 (waged), \$80 (unwaged). 9.00am to 6.00pm, NSW Parliament House (refer: <http://SAVE-Australia.com.au>)

March 11: COURSE, "BORDERLINES: AUSTRALIA'S REFUGEE DEBATE". The University of Sydney's Centre of Continuing Education is running an 8meeting course with Dr Paul White. Participants will be made aware of different perspectives in immigration policy and gain an understanding of domestic and international legal issues that have led to the current situation. Course cost: \$158. 6.30 – 8.30pm, Thursdays from 11 March (refer: <http://cce.usyd.edu.au/0427090>)

March 12: FORUM, "FORUM 1: NEW FORMS OF ACTIVISM". This forum will actively engage participants in discussing and analysing aspects of campaigning and organising in different settings and relating to the work of environmentalists, social justice advocates, union and community activists. Centre for Popular Education, University of Technology, Sydney, 9.00am – 2.00pm. View following link for costs. (http://cpe.uts.edu.au/forums/activism_forum_1.html)

March 13: SYDNEY RALLY, "INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY". 11.00am assemble at Town Hall, Sydney. March to Hyde Park. Speakers include Ann Summers, author, and Ann Sampson, Stop the War Coalition. For further info contact kiles@cfmeu.asn.au

March 14: PUBLIC FORUM, "TARIQ ALI SPEAKS ON EMPIRE & RESISTANCE". Author of Clash of Fundamentalisms & Bush in Babylon speaks at Clancy Auditorium, Gate 9, Uni of NSW, High St, Kensington, Sydney at 6.00pm. \$20/\$10. Organised by Green Left Weekly. Bookings essential. Tickets avail. from 23 Abercrombie St, Chippen- dale. (refer: <http://.greenleft.org.au>)

March 16: WORKSHOP, "CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND TERRORISM: Implications for Democracy". One- day workshop by Prof. Johan Galtung. The workshop will be divided into four sessions: struggles for democracy; thea- tres for conflict resolution; redefining sovereignty; and tomorrow's global citi- zens. 9.00am-5.30pm at Soka Gakkai International – Australia Culture Cen- tre, Homebush, Sydney. Cost, \$70 in- cludes lunch. (refer: http://.arts.usyd.edu.au/centres/cpacs/crd_main.htm)

March 16: CONFERENCE, "ECU- MENICAL CLIMATE CHANGE CON- FERENCE". Catholic Earthcare Austr- alia is working with the National Council of Churches, the Anglican Church and NGOs in promoting this conference in Canberra. The World Council of Churches spokesperson, Dr David Hallman, will address the issue of climate change. Conference at the Aus- tralian Centre for Christianity and Cul- ture, 15 Blackall St, Barton ACT. For details ring Col Brown: (02) 9956 5800.

March 19: FORUM, "REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS". A forum and discussion eve- ning to raise awareness of the issue of asylum seekers and their rights. 7.30- 9.30pm The Avenue Uniting Church, Blackburn, Victoria. (refer: http://.ajustaustralia.com/whatshappeni ng_events.php)

March 19: PUBLIC ADDRESS, "ON AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CAMPAIGN". Justice Dowd will speak on AI's campaign followed by comments and questions from the audi- ence. 7.00pm, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Newtown Station, Sydney (refer:

<http://.active.org.au/sydney/calendar/?dis play=zoom&event=1608>)

March 21: CONCERT, AUSTRALIAN BRANDENBURG ORCHESTRA "West End Baroque" at the Horbury Hunt Kincoppal-Rose Bay Chapel", with pre-concert drinks on the terrace over- looking Sydney Harbour. Tickets are strictly limited – RSVP immediately to ensure a booking (refer: http://.uniya.org/news/news_brandenbur g.html)

March 26-27: CONFERENCE, "REC- ONCILIATION YOUTH CONFER- ENCE". The ReconciliACTION Network will be convening this conference in partnership with Reconciliation Austr- alia, and will involve a range of work- shops and speakers. The Conference will be held at the University of Sydney. (Re- fer: <http://reconciliaction.org.au/events.php>)

March 26 – April 11: THEATRE PRO- DUCION, "CMI (A CERTAIN MARITIME INCIDENT)". A show de- vised from the transcripts of the Senate Select Committee inquiry into the Chil- dren Overboard affair. Showing at 'Per- formance Space', 199 Cleveland St. Red- fern, Sydney. (Wed-Sat 8.00pm, Sun 5.00pm). Cost \$20 and concessions. Contact: (02) 9698 7235 or boxof- fice@performancespace.com.au

April 1-2: CONFERENCE, "GLOB- ALISATION, FAMILIES AND WORK: Meeting the policy challenges of the next two decades". A two-day conference ex- amining the policy options, ideas and underlying values that inform work and family issues. Convened by Families Australia at the Brisbane Convention Centre and Exhibition Centre. Visit this website for cost and booking details (<http://familiesaustralia.org.au/>)

April 6-7: CONFERENCE, "A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE SOUTH AUS- TRALIA". Two day conference in Ade- laide and convened by the Office of Sus- tainability to determine a future combin- ing economic progress with protection of the environment and promotion of social equity. (refer: <http://.ccsa.asn.au>)

April 16-18: CONFERENCE, "LIVING THE DREAM". The 2nd National Catholic Family Gathering will take place at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, Sydney. Organised by the Family Working Group of the Bishops' Committee for the Family and for Life. Book before March 12 for early-bird rates. (refer: <http://familygathering.com.au>)

(email news of your forthcoming social justice event by the last week of each month to: admin@acsjc.org.au)

FEBRUARY NEWS MONITOR

JESUIT HEAD AFFIRMS POWER OF THE GRASSROOTS: Australian Jesuit Provincial Mark Raper said at the launch of Caritas Australia's Project Compassion Lenten Appeal that local communities and power bases are ultimately stronger than national politics and the forces of globalisation.

BRITISH BISHOPS OUTLINE MORAL DIMENSION OF TAXATION: The Catholic Church of England and Wales said that instead of an unfair penalty, taxation should be seen as a way all people can play a moral part in public life.

COMMISSION WELCOMES UN RECOMMENDATION ON EAST TIMOR: The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of Brisbane welcomed the recommendation by UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, that the Security Council approve an extension of the mandate for the UN's peacekeeping mission in East Timor.

COMMISSION ESCALATES PUSH FOR LOW PAID WORKERS: The Church's employment relations body stepped up its lobbying for a fair federal minimum wage in a new submission to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's Safety Net Review.

NZ MINISTER RESPONDS TO CARITAS CHILD LABOUR SURVEY SHOCK: NZ Labour Minister Margaret Wilson said moves are underway to ensure children and young people are aware of their rights and legal protections at work following a Caritas NZ survey that revealed child exploitation in the country.

BISHOP GRECH WELCOMES NEW GOVT POLICY ON IRANIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS: Bishop Joseph Grech welcomed reports that the Federal Government is no longer forcing failed Iranian asylum seekers to return home to possible persecution.

BISHOP CALLS POLITICIANS' PARTY LOYALTY 'CORRUPT': Bunbury's Bishop Gerard Holohan said political parties "violate 'the rules of justice' when members of parliament are forced to follow 'the party line' instead of what they believe to be 'in the best interests of their electors'".

CATHOLIC HEALTH SAYS CHURCHES 'SQUEEZED OUT OF' AGED CARE: Catholic Health Australia accused the Federal Government of "squeezing church and charitable groups out of aged care" in favour of commercial operators driven by profit.

DEATH OF SOUTH AFRICA'S ARCHBISHOP DENIS HURLEY: South African human rights champion Archbishop Denis Hurley died at the age of 88, ending a life marked by an outstanding contribution to the struggle against apartheid, for his concern for the poor.

VATICAN URGES COUNTRIES TO OBSERVE LANDMINES CONVENTION: The Holy See stressed the importance of adherence to the Ottawa Convention which 141 countries signed five years ago, and the mobilisation of resources to care for landmine victims.

CATHOLIC WELFARE MEETS TO IDENTIFY 'CYCLES OF DISADVANTAGE': Catholic Welfare Australia determined that any changes to social policy in Australia must focus on assisting individuals and families to break

through the 'cycles of disadvantage' which currently stand in the way of poor Australians living a better quality of life.

ARCHBISHOP WELCOMES SA POKER MACHINE REDUCTION: Adelaide's Archbishop Philip Wilson praised the South Australian Government for its initiative to eliminate 3000 poker machines from the state's hotels and clubs.

CHAPLAIN SAYS REDFERN RIOT DEMANDS JUDICIAL ENQUIRY: Longtime chaplain of Sydney's Aboriginal Catholic Community Fr Frank Fletcher backed Senator Aden Ridgeway's call for a "proper judicial investigation" into the riot involving the Aboriginal community at Redfern.

CARDINAL WARNS LAW OF FORCE MEANS INTERNATIONAL ANARCHY: Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, warned that when the law of force prevails over international law, all are "plunged into a condition of anarchy and profound illegality".

VINNIES SAYS JOB PLAN PUTS DOLLARS BEFORE DISABLED: The St Vincent de Paul Society spoke out about its concern over a Federal Government trial initiative that rewards Job Network Providers with up to \$6000 for every Disability Support Pension recipient placed in a position.

NETWORK'S CALL FOR GOVT TRANSPARENCY ON FREE TRADE AGREEMENT: While Catholic observers have been waiting for more information on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to allow them to assess the between Australia and the US, the Sisters of Charity Advocacy Network criticised the "the secrecy of such agreements and the lack of transparency in negotiations".

COMMISSION IN WAKE UP CALL ON "GOLDEN PARACHUTES": Australian big business needs an urgent "reality check" following the latest in an increasing number of large termination and resignation payouts to executives, according to Brisbane's Catholic Justice and Peace Commission.

NUNS BLOW WHISTLE ON ORGAN TRAFFICKERS: Five missionary nuns in Mozambique said they've been threatened with death since telling authorities about an organ-trafficking scheme that allegedly kidnaps and kills children and youths.

BISHOP CAUTIONS JUDGES ON ANTI-TERROR LAWS: Sydney Auxiliary Bishop Anthony Fisher told members of Sydney's legal fraternity that the law is under challenge from "those who would respond to perceived threats to security with suspension of rights".

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/402>

MARCH SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

MARCH 1 INTERNATIONAL DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION DAY: March 1, International Death Penalty Abolition Day marks the anniversary of the date in 1847 when the US State of Michigan officially became the first English-speaking territory in the world to abolish capital punishment. The vast majority of executions worldwide are carried out in just a few countries. In 2002, 81 per cent of all known executions took place in China (over 1,000), Iran (113) and the USA (71).

There is a growing campaign against the death penalty for the following reasons:

- the death penalty is a blatant violation of the fundamental right to life;
- it is a cruel and inhumane punishment, irrevocable and irreparable;
- there is the risk of executing the innocent;
- the death penalty has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments;
- it is an instrument of revenge and not of prevention;
- it is discriminatory and is often used disproportionately against the poor, minorities and members of racial, ethnic and religious groups.

MARCH 1 NUCLEAR FREE AND INDEPENDENT PACIFIC DAY: On this day in 1954, the US "Bravo" nuclear bomb was detonated close to the surface of Bikini Atoll, gouging out a crater 75 metres deep and 1800 metres across, and contaminating the residents of Rongelap, Rongerik, Utirik and Ailignae Atolls. This day has become a day of remembrance and renewed effort for a halt to all nuclear activities and militarism in the Pacific.

MARCH 7 CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY: The Top Ten Least Wanted Items List names the most commonly found rubbish items during the clean up: Ocigarette butts, plastic chip and confectionery bags, glass alcoholic beverage containers, plastic bottle caps or lids, small paper pieces, glass pieces, metal or aluminium foil wrappers, aluminium soft drink cans, metal or aluminium bottle caps, PET and other plastic drink bottles and plastic straws. - Clean Up Australia Rubbish Report: A Snapshot 1998-2002

MARCH 8 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: The United Nations General Assembly, composed of delegates from every Member State, invites us on this day to recognize that peace and social progress require the active participation and equality of women, and to acknowledge the contribution of women to international peace and security. Worldwide, women's access to education and proper health care has increased; their participation in the paid labour force has grown; and legislation that promises equal opportunities for women and respect for their human rights has been adopted in many countries. However, many women still do not have the same rights and opportunities as men. The majority of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor are women and children. On average, women receive between 30 and 40 per cent less pay than men earn for the same work. Everywhere, women continue to be victims of violence, with rape and domestic violence listed as significant causes of disability and death among women.

MARCH 20 WORLD DAY OF PLANETARY CONSCIOUSNESS: Many of the world's problems and conflicts arise because we have lost sight of the basic humanity that binds us all together as a human family. We tend to forget that despite the diversity of race, religion, ideology, and so forth, people are equal in their basic wish for peace and happiness. However, this will be achieved neither by merely talking or thinking about it, nor by waiting for someone else to do something about it. We each have to take responsibility as best we can within our own sphere of activity. ...

"It is natural that we should strive to improve our standard of living, but not at any cost. The more we pursue profit and material improvement, ignoring the deeper values, such as compassion, tolerance and contentment that comes of a corresponding inner growth, the quicker ethical values will disappear from our communities. Then we will all experience unhappiness in the long run, for when there is no place for justice and honesty in people's hearts, the weak are the first to suffer. ...

"The last century was marred by conflict and war. Let us take steps now to ensure that this new century will be characterized instead by non-violence and dialogue, the preconditions of peaceful co-existence. It is natural that in any human society there will be differences and conflicts, but we have to develop confidence that dialogue and other peaceful methods are a valid alternative to violence in all our relations. ...

"Improving our world is not just a matter of relying on governments and leaders. We all have to participate. I pray that everyone ... will be inspired to do something practical to increase respect for the Earth, to foster genuine peace among its people, and to nurture greater compassion in all our lives."

- From the Message of Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, for the first World Day of Planetary Consciousness

MARCH 24 ARCHBISHOP ROMERO: In 1977 Oscar Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, capital of El Salvador. He was not ex-

pected to challenge the ruling oligarchy of the country, which owned 80 per cent of the land and terrorised workers and landless peasants. Working with and for the poor changed him, enabling him to see the unjust structures operating in his country. He was assassinated as he celebrated Mass in the unfinished cathedral, which he had refused to complete as long as the poor of the city were poorly housed and were hungry.

*Peace is not the product of terror or fear.
Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.
Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.
Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.
Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity.
It is right and it is duty.*

- Archbishop Oscar Romero

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