



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,

Two recent events have cast the spotlight on the operation of Australia's Immigration policy. The removal of a family to Pakistan and the wrongful detention of an Australian resident in immigration detention have highlighted the human impact of the policies of forced deportation and of mandatory detention.

DEPORTATION

The deportation of the Bakhtiyari family in the early hours of Thursday 30th December ended their exhaustive struggle to secure refugee status in Australia.

At one o'clock in the morning, Roqia and her six children were awoken by immigration officials and taken under guard from residential detention in Port Augusta to the airport. The father, Ali, was transported from the Baxter immigration detention centre. Two hours later the reunited family was deported on a charter flight and later transferred to a commercial flight in Bangkok. Media, local residents and refugee advocates were present to witness the deportation in the middle of the night.

The Government maintains the Bakhtiyaris were from Pakistan, making their claim to be Afghani refugees invalid. The family was returned to Pakistan despite a last-ditch effort to find them a safer alternative in New Zealand. (<http://www.smh.com.au/news/Immigration/Bakhtiari-family-arrive-in-Pakistan/2005/01/03/1104601268147.html>)

As Hazaras, the Bakhtiyaris are at risk of persecution in Pakistan or Afghanistan. But Mr West, the Director of Centacare Adelaide who cared for the family for over a year, suggested they would probably leave Pakistan soon after their arrival. "It's only speculation at this stage, but I think they will want to get back to Afghanistan as quickly as they can... because if it's a choice between staying in Pakistan and going to Afghanistan, where at least they know the language and have friends and family, then Afghanistan is the safer option."

Days later, their arrival in Afghanistan was confirmed. (<http://www.cathnews.com/news/501/4.html>;
<http://www.cathnews.com/news/501/100.html>)

On the day of their deportation, the Minister for Immigration, Senator Amanda Vanstone said the Bakhtiyari family had been given a fair go.

"From primary decision, through Refugee Review Tribunal hearings and 20 subsequent legal actions, the family's claims have been tested and re-tested. At the end, the conclusive finding was that the family was not owed protection and, consequently, the removal process is now being followed", the Senator said.

Days later, Senator Vanstone said the family would be billed for at least a third of total costs amounting to over \$3 million for their detention and deportation. Failure to meet these costs would deny any future visas for the family. Described by West as "a cruel condition", this will make it virtually impossible for Church agencies and Catholic schools to sponsor the children so they can return to complete their education. (<http://www.cathnews.com.au/news/501/4.html>;
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200501/s1275505.htm>)

The story of the Bakhtiyari family's five-year struggle was characterised by treacherous journeys to Australia, mandatory detention and an escape from Woomera, Family and High Court cases regarding the detention of children, the care of the children and later their mother and newborn in Adelaide by Centacare with the support of schools and the local community, the appeal to other countries to grant them asylum, and their forced deportation.

Their highly publicized ordeal has highlighted the treatment asylum seekers experience in the normal operation of Australia's immigration detention system. It also raises the same concerns explored at length in a recent study of Australia's treatment of rejected asylum seekers. "Deported to Danger" was undertaken by the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education in cooperation with the School of Education, Australian Catholic University. (<http://www.erc.org.au/research/1096416029.shtml>)

Centacare Adelaide is raising donations to assist the Bakhtiyari family re-establish themselves in Afghanistan. If you would like to help, you can send cheques or money orders to "Centacare-Bakhtiyari Support Fund" at 33 Wakefield Street, Adelaide SA 5000.

DETENTION

Adding to the spotlight on immigration detention have been the revelations about an Australian resident's mistaken detention over a period of ten months. With inadequate psychiatric assessment and failures in state-based missing persons registers, Cornelia Rau was held by the Immigration Department as an illegal immigrant for six months in a Queensland jail and then four months in Baxter Detention Centre.

Following these revelations, the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) and the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) joined calls for the Government to ensure there is no repeat of this person's ordeal and to address the similar treatment of all people in detention. (<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/latest.html>)

The Federal Government has opted for a private investigation of the detention of Cornelia Rau. Others, including Ms Rau's family, have called for a public inquiry.

ACSJC Chairman, Bishop Christopher Saunders, said "Whatever the process of inquiry, the public will be looking for reforms ensuring no person will ever again fall through the cracks in the existing system.

"Inadequacies in state-based missing person notifications will be assessed and there may be calls for a national database. Undoubtedly, all levels of government will need to improve standards of psychiatric assessment and care in jails and detention centres.

"In addition to concerns about the unfortunate treatment of an Australian resident, this inquiry must consider the overall standard of care afforded to all people in detention. The treatment of Cornelia Rau is unacceptable. Logically then, we need to consider the treatment of others in immigration detention who are also vulnerable and deserving of care and dignity", he said.

Bishop Joseph Grech, Chairman of the Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees, said "The Catholic Bishops of Australia have raised concerns on numerous occasions about conditions in immigration detention centres. We have stated our opposition to mandatory detention of asylum seekers, beyond the need for initial processing.

"Mental health is a significant issue in immigration detention centres. We call on the Australian Government to ensure that due consideration be given to the conditions endured by immigration detainees during the investigations that are now underway", he said.

Last year, the Australian Catholic Bishops expressed their concerns about the injurious nature of prolonged detention on many detainees who have already experienced great trauma in fleeing oppression and braving a dangerous journey to Australia.

Groups they identified as being particularly vulnerable to harm included children, unaccompanied minors, single women, those with a mental or physical disability, torture or trauma victims, and women in the late stages of pregnancy or nursing babies.

(http://www.acmro.catholic.org.au/media/2004_2506_message.htm;
<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bc/migref/2004051418.htm>)

Among other groups calling for a broader terms of reference for the current investigation, Amnesty International Australia is calling for the review of: how mandatory automatic detention of 'unlawful non-citizens' can result in wrongful detention; the broader mental health concerns of detainees in immigration detention; and all allegations of abuse of Cornelia Rau and other persons in immigration detention. The Amnesty 'rapid response' briefing and suggestions for action can be found at:

http://www.amnesty.org.au/whats_happening/refugees/actions/article?cid=20&pid=770

Last week, Senator Vanstone announced changes to Immigration Department procedures including a 28-day limit to the detention of suspected illegal immigrants in state correctional facilities; stronger procedures (including fingerprinting) to establish a person's identity with complex cases referred to Canberra for guidance where identity or status cannot be confirmed within the time-limit.

Opposition Immigration spokesperson, Laurie Ferguson is critical of the announced changes saying they are too late. He has called for an independent inspectorate to look at detention facilities and for independent medical access to people in detention. Greens Senator Kerry Nettle said there are far more significant issues concerning the health of detainees in corrections or immigration detention facilities. (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200502/s1311618.htm>;
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200502/s1311769.htm>)

John Ferguson
National Executive Officer

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or download an order form from the ACSJC website:
<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/CONTENT/PDF/TEMPLATE-ORDERFORM.pdf>)

2005 SOCIAL JUSTICE DIARY/CALENDAR – SEASONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: The 2005 Diary/Calendar explores the Gospel challenge to live justly in today's society. A particular social justice theme is developed each month, providing a social justice program for the full year. Information and ideas for prayer and reflection are included. Cost: \$6.60 (inc. GST), plus postage.
http://www.acsjc.org.au/CONTENT/publications/social_justice_calendar.html

DISCUSSION GUIDE – WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE 2005: The title of the Holy Father's 2005 Message is 'Do not be Overcome by Evil but Overcome Evil with Good'. This Discussion Guide provides a brief summary of the message, some questions for consideration or discussion, and additional resources. Website paper available at: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

OCCASIONAL PAPER: THE BEATTITUDES AND JUSTICE: Catholic Social Justice Series No.52 – by Fr Gerard Moore SM enunciates the characteristics of the beatitudes and explores the kind of "heart" they require of us in thorough, deep and thoughtful consideration of each beatitude. (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below)

OCCASIONAL PAPER: THE TIMOR SEA'S OIL AND GAS: WHAT'S FAIR?

Catholic Social Justice Series No.51 – Fr Frank Brennan SJ considers the current negotiations between Australia and Timor-Leste concerning the resource sharing arrangements and maritime boundaries of the Timor Sea. (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below).

(Postage rates for Catholic Social Justice Series Papers: 1 copy \$1; 2-3 copies \$1.45; 4-5 copies \$2.45)

CURRENT ISSUES/RESOURCES

AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS REGISTER

The Melbourne Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace has released the annual Australian Human Rights Register. The Register is a NGO audit of Human rights. It records individual reports and accounts of developments and violations and analyses them in the light of the human rights conventions that Australia has ratified. It focuses on individual instances within Australia and contains reports from community legal centres, non-government organisations and the national media.

Each year the Register is used as a catalyst to draw attention to the state of human rights in Australia. To get your copy online, visit:

<http://www.melbourne.catholic.org.au/ccjdp/pdf/HumanRightsRegister2004e.pdf>

MEDIA RELEASE – PLIGHT OF ALL IN IMMIGRATION MUST BE CONSIDERED – 10 February 2005

Following revelations about the detention of Australian resident Cornelia Rau, the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office and Australian Catholic Social Justice Council have joined calls for the Government to ensure an adequate process of inquiry – to prevent a repeat of this person's ordeal and to address the similar treatment of all people in detention.

(<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bishops/confpres/2005100214.htm>

<http://www.acsjc.org.au/index.shtml>)

EDMUND RICE CENTRE – "DEPORTED TO DANGER"

In September 2004 the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice & Community Education, in consultation with the School of Education of the ACU, released their study of Australia's Treatment of 40 Rejected Asylum Seekers. To download this informative and important study visit: <http://www.erc.org.au/research/1096416029.shtml>.

Also... Just News is now a electronic newsletter by the Edmund Rice Centre, covering issues of peace, justice and ecology. To subscribe, email Jill Finnane at jill@erc.org.au

CARITAS AUSTRALIA – "PROJECT COMPASSION 2005"

In 2005, Project Compassion will focus on the millions of people around the world who are trapped by poverty. The goal of United Nations member states including Australia, is to halve poverty by 2015 through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The damage caused by the Boxing Day Tsunami has made the attainment of these goals even more urgent.

Time is running out and we all have a role to play. That is why in 2005, the theme for Project Compassion is "The Challenge is Poverty, the Time is Now!" For more info on Project Compassion, visit:

<http://www.caritas.org.au/ourwork/pc05/index.htm>

INFORMATION KIT: "INDIGENOUS HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA"

The Fred Hollows Foundation is raising awareness about the health emergency faced by Indigenous communities throughout Australia. The thoroughly researched and accessible briefing papers provide accurate, relevant information on the current status of Indigenous health and its underlying causes. (refer: <http://www.hollows.org/content/TextOnly.aspx?s=146>)

NATSIEC PRAYER DIARY

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Council has produced a resource to support ecumenical prayer and partnerships between Indigenous Australians and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Prayer Diary includes possible readings, prayer concerns for each day and reflections, marking where appropriate key dates in the Indigenous calendar. (refer: http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec/theology/prayer_diary)

COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, prepared by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace presented at the Vatican in late October 2004 is now available for purchase. Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council has said the compendium is "an instrument for the moral and pastoral discernment of the complex events that mark our time, a guide to inspire, ... and an aid to the faithful concerning the Church's teaching in the area of social morality."

The document of over 500 pages in length can be ordered for \$51.95 through Pauline Books & Media outlets in Adelaide (08 8223 2735), Melbourne (03 9882 3424) Sydney (02 9264 8630) or visit online at: <http://www.paulinebooks.com.au>

MARCH NOTICES

FEBRUARY 21 – JUNE 24, COURSE: "MISSION THROUGH DIALOGUE ON ECOLOGY". As part of the MA studies in Mission offered at the Strathfield Catholic Institute of Sydney, Fr Charles Rue will be offering a course on Dialogue with the Environmental Movement in Australia. This course recognizes the ecological movement as a work of the Spirit and explores ways in which the Church can dialogue with that movement in Australia. For more information call (02) 9752 9500 or refer: <http://www.cis.catholic.edu.au/ca.htm>

FEBRUARY 22 – MARCH 10: JESUIT LENTEN SEMINARS, "HONESTY MATTERS – THE ETHICS OF DAILY LIFE". The 2005 Jesuit Lenten Seminars bring together a number of people prominent in public life to talk about this fundamental quality. The remaining Lenten seminars will run from 7.30 to 9.30pm at the following locations and dates:
Western Sydney, March 1 at Loyola Senior High School, 91 North Pde, Mt Druitt
Sydney, March 2 at Marist College, 270 Miller Street, North Sydney
Brisbane, March 7 at Christian Brothers College, Gregory Terrace
Wollongong, March 10 at Edmund Rice College Hall, 112 Mt Keira Rd, Wollongong
(refer: <http://www.uniya.org/news/lenten2005.html>)

FEBRUARY 23 – JUNE 1: STUDY GROUP ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING. A group will be meeting on Wednesday afternoons from 1 to 4 pm from February through June at St Paul's Theological College in Brisbane to study Catholic Social Teachings. The major Church documents since Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum (1891) and including the Australian Bishops' Common Wealth for the Common Good (1992) will be introduced by Lecturer Fr. Kevin McGovern. The cost is \$340 (audit) or \$540 (full participation). For more information, contact Fr Kevin on 0409 635 963. To register, contact St Paul's on (07) 3621 8900.

MARCH 1: PUBLIC FORUM, "MENTAL HEALTH AND MANDATORY DETENTION". Detainees in immigration detention centres are at grave risk of experiencing serious mental health disorders, with chronic depression, self-harm and suicide attempts far from uncommon among long-term detainees. Some of Australia's leading mental health researchers will air their perspectives and findings at Amnesty International's Mental Health and Mandatory Detention Forum. 6.00 – 9.00pm, The Irish Club, 171 Elizabeth St, Brisbane, Queensland. For more information contact Amnesty International Australia, Queensland on (07) 3210 5200.

MARCH 2: TRAINING SESSION, "WORKING WITH REFUGEE YOUNG PEOPLE". The Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA), the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) and the Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) of NSW will be running a training session for NSW workers from a variety of services who wish to become aware of the issues facing refugee young people. The session will be held in Sydney. Call YAPA for more information on (02) 9319 1100 ext. 6.
(http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/html/news_and_events/news_and_events.html)

MARCH 2: COMMUNITY RALLY IN SUPPORT OF THE DOOMADGEE FAMILY. 1.00pm, Queensland Parliament House, George Street, Brisbane. This is a peaceful, non-violent protest action. For further details call: 0401227443

MARCH 2: LENTEN LECTURE, "BUILDING A HEALING COMMUNITY." World Vision Australia's Chief Executive, Rev. Tim Costello, will present ACU National's Lenten Lecture. 8.00pm, Christ Lecture Theatre, ACU Melbourne Campus, 115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy, Melbourne. (refer: http://www.acu.edu.au/acu_national/News___Events_Calendar/Events.cfm)

MARCH 2: FILM SCREENING, "REFUGEE: A RECIPE." A short film that explores the impacts of the Federal Government's policies of mandatory detention and temporary protection on the life of one refugee, "Ali". Film-maker Liam Ward will discuss the making of "Refugee: A Recipe". Sponsored by the RMIT Community Advocacy Unit and the RMIT Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project. 7.00 to 8.00pm, Kaleide Theatre
360 Swanston Street, Melbourne. (refer: http://www.melbourne.indymedia.org/calendar/event_display_detail.php?event_id=821&day=2&month=3&year=2005)

MARCH 4: FORUM, "PATHWAYS - EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS AT RISK." The forum will inform and provide information to school counsellors, welfare staff and youth service providers regarding options to assist young people stay in main stream school and options to assist young people who are unable to stay at school. Guest Speakers from the Lighthouse Project, Centrelink, Local Homework Help Centres, the Big Brother Big Sister mentoring program, Links to Learning. 12 noon to 3.15pm, Granville Youth & Community Recreation Centre, Diamond Ave, Granville, Sydney. For further info call YCW on (02) 9682 6719 or email: wayout@ycw.org.au

MARCH 8: FORUM, "HUMANWRITES" The Law Institute of Victoria presents a free conversational forum on human rights between two influential writers and political commentators: Robert Manne and Klaus Neumann. The general public is invited to hear this informed discussion about refugee and asylum seeker issues in Australia. Bookings essential: Email: events@liv.asn.au by Friday 4 March. 1.00 - 2.00pm, Law Institute of Victoria, 470 Bourke St Melbourne. Call (03) 9607 9504 or visit: <http://www.liv.asn.au/events/calendar/HumanWrites.pdf>

MARCH 9: LECTURE, "TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHY: BABY AND BATHWATER." James Franklin will deliver the Aquinas Academy Diamond Jubilee Lecture. He is the author of *Corrupting the Youth: A History of Philosophy in Australia* and *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability Before Pascal*. 6.00 - 8.00pm, the Crypt, St Patrick's Church, The Rocks, Sydney. Cost: \$10. Coffee and tea will be provided. For more information call 02 9247 4651 or email sandra@acquinas-academy.com (refer: <http://www.erc.org.au/events/1106268167.shtml>)

MARCH 9: FORUM, "INDIGENOUS HEALTH." The Indigenous Health Forum will be chaired by Prof. Mick Dodson. 5.30 to 8.30pm. Welcome to Country 6.00pm. National Museum of Australia. (refer: <http://www.antar.org.au/>)

MARCH 13: FUNDRAISER: "OXFAM COMMUNITY AID ABROAD WALK AGAINST WANT." For details about events that will be held around the nation for Walk Against Want, visit: <http://www.oxfam.org.au/walk/>

MARCH 15: PUBLIC MEETING, "JUSTICE FOR JACK." Find out more about the extraordinary case of "Jihad Jack" and what it means for our civil liberties at the Justice for Jack public meeting. Speakers include: Jack Thomas, Rob Stary – Jack's lawyer, Jude McCulloch. 7:30pm, New Council Chambers, Trades Hall, cnr Lygon & Victoria Sts Carlton, Melbourne. (refer: http://www.melbourne.indymedia.org/calendar/event_display_detail.php?event_id=863&day=15&month=3&year=2005)

MARCH 16: PUBLIC LECTURE, "TOWARDS A STABLE SOLOMONS: OPERATION HELPEM FREN AND THE REGIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION." What has the Australian Government-led 'Operation Helpem Fren' achieved in the troubled Pacific nation of the Solomon Islands? In the first Asia-Pacific Solferino Lecture for 2005, a panel of policy experts will assess the work of this historic initiative and explore some of the implications for Australia's relations in the region. Entry \$10 (\$5 for concession) all proceeds going to the Australian Red Cross. 6:30 - 08:00 pm, Basement Theatre, Sidney Myer Asia Centre, The University of Melbourne, (corner Swanston Street and Monash Road, Parkville). Call (03) 8327 7840 or visit: http://events.unimelb.edu.au/eventid_1412.html

MARCH 18 – 21: EVENT, "TWO FIRES FESTIVAL." The festival is a new event for the town of Braidwood, NSW. It will have national significance, bringing together artists, writers, filmmakers, poets, activists and environmental thinkers from around Australia. Inspired by the legacy of the Australian poet, conservationist and reconciliation activists Judith Wright, the festival will celebrate and nurture Society's two fires: Arts and Activism. Festival Pass \$120 (\$70 concession). Day Pass \$50 (\$30 concession). (refer: <http://www.twofiresfestival.com>)

MARCH 24: PUBLIC MEETING, "BRING THEM HOME NOW!" At the beginning of the third Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference, Stan Goff will speak at a public event about Iraq, war and peace. Stan is a member of the Military Families Speak Out campaign and a member of the Coordinating Committee of the Bring Them Home Now movement in the U.S. Entry \$20/\$12 concession. 7.00pm at Ashfield Boys High School, Sydney. Call (02) 9690 1977 (refer: <http://www.apsc.net.au/>)

MARCH 24 – 28: CONFERENCE, "GLOBALISE JUSTICE – NOT WAR AND POVERTY!" The third Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference will be held at Ashfield Boys High School in Sydney. A host of international speakers on civil, political, economic and social rights. Four days of feature talks, workshops, discussions and films. Full registration fee \$140; concessions to \$25. For further information call (02) 9690 1977. (refer: <http://www.apsc.net.au/>)

MARCH 31: DINNER EVENT, "FABRIC OF SOCIETY DINNER." Fair Wear and Kerry Flanagan, Head of the Federal Office for Women, invites you to this event that aims to recognise the contribution of everyone in the clothing supply chain. In working for a better deal for outworkers you will be able to choose where to shop and support the fabric of society. Guest Speakers: Anna MacPhee, Director of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency & Ms Nguyen, Clothing Outworker. 6.30 for 7.00pm, The Royal Gardens, Capitol Square, Sydney. \$70 per person. For registration details call (02) 9793 9150 (refer: <http://www.fairwear.org.au>)

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

MARCH NEWS MONITOR

PARISH STANDS UP FOR REJECTED ASYLUM SEEKER FAMILY: The parish priest of Wodonga in Victoria's Sandhurst Diocese rallied the local community to support a family of asylum seekers from Kosovo that failed to gain official refugee status and the right to stay in Australia.

ECUMENICAL ASSAULT ON GOVT MORE IRAQ TROOPS DECISION: The National Council of Churches in Australia - which includes the Catholic Church - savaged the Government's decision to send more troops to Iraq as "scandalous", saying the Prime Minister had broken trust with the Australian people.

ACU HOSTS CONFERENCE ON SALTMARSHES: The Australian Catholic University's North Sydney (MacKillop) campus hosted Australasian Saltmarshes 2005, a conference that explored the status and ecology of coastal saltmarsh in Australia and New Zealand.

REFUGEE ADVOCATE TELLS JESUIT SEMINAR THAT DEMOCRACY REQUIRES HONESTY: Democracy demands a degree of honesty and compassion in politicians and the courage of the media to report the truth, refugee barrister Julian Burnside argued last night at Uniya's Lenten Seminar 2005 in Melbourne.

POPE TELLS MEDIA TO PROMOTE TRUTH, NOT TRASH: Pope John Paul II released a 20-page apostolic letter that urges Catholics to scrutinise the media to ensure that it is working responsibly to promote truth, and to use all media, including the Internet, to spread the Gospel message.

COMMISSION PASSES ON AS AUSTRALIA IGNORES KYOTO: Brisbane's Catholic Justice and Peace Commission marked the coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol to curb climate change, with an education initiative aimed at householders.

ECUMENICAL AID AGENCY FORCETEN TO CLOSE: After nearly four decades raising and distributing international development aid, the interchurch aid and development agency that includes Caritas Australia, announced its closure.

CATHOLIC BODIES JOIN NEW DISABILITY WELFARE ALLIANCE: Catholic Welfare Australia, Catholic Health Australia, and the St Vincent de Paul Society are part of a new alliance of disability and welfare organisations that is promoting a positive program of reform to improve payments and employment services for people with disabilities.

SCHOOLS ATTACKED FOR PUTTING PR BEFORE STUDENTS: Some high-profile independent Catholic schools have been attacked for their "zero tolerance" approach to drugs, with a new Jesuit Social Services report claiming they are more concerned with their public reputations than student welfare.

VINNIES BRANDS TAX SYSTEM 'ROBIN HOOD IN REVERSE': Commenting on the current parliament's consideration of tax cuts, St Vincent de Paul NSW/ACT spokesperson Terry McCarthy said most Australians would agree that it is not fair to give generously to the rich while taking from the poor.

AMERICAN NUN ASSASSINATED IN BRAZIL: An American nun who spent decades fighting efforts by loggers and large landowners to expropriate lands and clear large areas of the Amazon rainforest was shot to death on Saturday in northern Brazil.

DEATH ROW MOVIE NUN'S AUSTRALIAN VISIT: Sr Helen Prejean csj - the anti-capital punishment advocate depicted in the 1995 film *Dead Man Walking* - made a return visit to Australia in late February, to take part in public lectures, presentations and conversations, in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.

CHURCH CALL FOR SCRUTINY OF PLIGHT OF ALL DETAINEES: Following the recent revelation of the detention of psychiatric patient Cornelia Rau, the Church's peak migration and justice organisations have joined forces to call on the Federal Government to ensure an adequate process of inquiry.

BRITISH BISHOPS BAN DISCRIMINATION AGAINST GAYS, CO-HABITORS : The Catholic bishops of England and Wales have determined that gays and co-habiting couples can no longer be denied employment by the Church.

TIMORESE CHURCH OPPOSES WAR CRIMES DEAL: East Timor's new Catholic bishop opposed a deal between Timorese and Indonesian leaders to drop trials over atrocities committed during the country's 1999 independence process, saying it lacks public support.

BISHOP SAYS WATER CONSERVATION IS A MORAL DUTY: The threat of a dire water shortage is another warning for Australians to wake up to the gifts that God has given us, or be guilty of "culpable ignorance", according to Bishop Christopher Toohy, chairman of Catholic Earthcare.

POPE SAYS ORGAN TRANSPLANTS MUST "GUARANTEE RESPECT FOR LIFE AND FOR THE HUMAN PERSON": The Vatican released a Letter from Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences supporting the practice of transplanting organs from the deceased.

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/502>

MARCH SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

DEATH PENALTY - MARCH 1 INTERNATIONAL DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION DAY: Today 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 percent of all known executions took place in China (over 1,000), Iran (113) and the USA (71).

OSCAR ROMERO - MARCH 24 HOLY THURSDAY - 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF ASSASSINATION OF ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO: In 1977 Oscar Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, capital of El Salvador. An academic, he was not expected to challenge the ruling class, which owned 80 percent 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.

Romero was shot at the altar on March 24, 1980, 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. The previous day, he had made his prophetic call to the Salvadoran army to stop the repression, calling on soldiers not to obey unjust orders to kill their own sisters and brothers.

MARCH 25 GOOD FRIDAY: Jesus was executed by the State with two other criminals. As we commemorate the death of Jesus we are sadly aware that many nations still use the death penalty.

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