



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,

Beginning last week, Australia has been celebrating Reconciliation Week. It commenced with Sorry Day on Monday 26 May - commemorating the anniversary of the 1997 tabling of the Inquiry Report about the separation of Indigenous children from their families - Bringing them Home.

The Week of Prayer for Reconciliation is linked with Reconciliation Week and occurs between 27 May and 3 June each year. These dates are significant. The first marks the anniversary of the 1967 referendum, which gave Indigenous people equal rights under the Constitution, and the second marks the High Court's 1992 judgement in the Mabo case.

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council introduced a page on its website to mark the importance of this week with prayer. This page can be accessed at:
http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/issues/national_reconciliation_week_2003.html

THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR RECONCILIATION: The movement for Reconciliation, pursued by Indigenous and local communities, governments, church and community groups, has gained momentum over the past decade.

It is broadly aimed at forging partnerships to:

- achieve social and economic equity for Indigenous Australians;
- strengthen the people's movement for Reconciliation; and
- to acknowledge the past and build a framework for a shared future.

These are the three goals of Reconciliation Australia and its Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/>).

Australia supports the Reconciliation process. The demonstration of one million Australians around the nation in the 2000 "Walk for Reconciliation" puts this beyond doubt. This symbolic event also revealed that National Sorry Day is an important part of the Journey of Healing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The community understands that Reconciliation entails both symbolic and practical initiatives. Many people believe it would be important, symbolically, for the Australian Government to say sorry for the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. Such an apology would show a commitment to acknowledging the wider impact of white colonization, the dispossession of Aborigines from their lands, and years of deprivation.

However, there has been no apology and little progress towards national reconciliation since that time. There has also been little support for the Roadmap for Reconciliation (<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/roadmap/>). The needs of Indigenous peoples and the support for reconciliation have been allowed to slip from national attention or have been eclipsed by other national and world events.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: So, Reconciliation Week has been as much a reminder of this unfinished story in Australia's history as it has been a celebration of the strength of Indigenous culture and the optimism of all who seek national reconciliation.

The current impasse in the process is evidenced in the limited approach of the Commonwealth to what it calls 'practical' reconciliation. It is true that Australia's governments continue to fund practical initiatives to improve the access of Indigenous Australians to health, housing, education, employment and other social services. And there have been some innovative and successful policies introduced in these areas over recent years. However, despite these, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders continue to fall far behind the broader community on almost every social and economic indicator.

Generally it could be said that, while important in its amelioration of their social and economic disadvantage, the level of public funding for Indigenous Affairs has failed to address the full range of needs experienced by this community or successfully enabled a social and economic base for self-determination. Many Indigenous Australians continue to endure 'third' or 'fourth world' conditions.

Last week, Democrats Senator Aden Ridgeway called on the Government to abandon the 'false divide' between practical and symbolic reconciliation and to show more commitment to the process (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s863588.htm>).

It is hard to imagine an effective reconciliation if both the symbolic and practical aspects of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous citizens are not considered and addressed together. This is obvious in some of the critical struggles of securing land rights under the amended Native Title Act, of seeking from the Government an adequate system of compensation for members of the Stolen Generation, and of preventing the incarceration of young people under harsh sentencing regimes. These have very practical significance as well as a symbolic one that is inseparable from Australia's history of settlement and colonization.

A GENEROUS HEART AND NATIONAL LEADERSHIP: Both the symbolic and the practical aspects of disadvantage need to be recognised in the process of reconciliation. A more holistic approach with the momentum of strong political will is required.

The Catholic Bishops' Committee for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and their advisory group, the National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Catholic Commission, last week called for a renewed commitment to National Reconciliation. They said this: "Government concern to follow the path of 'practical reconciliation' is admirable but in itself it is inadequate to address 'the practical, cultural and spiritual dimensions or reconciliation'.

"This country has a need for political leadership, which will restore impetus and energy to deal with the unfinished business of reconciliation in our land, in our time. Recognizing the wrongs of the past must necessarily lead us as a nation to express our sorrow and make amends for the injustices that have been done in the name of settlement and colonization.

"The generous heart to help overcome disadvantages presently suffered by the First Peoples of Australia is a responsibility that weighs heavily on all Australians. To make right those things that are wrong is not merely an act of charity to which we can passively accede but rather it is an act of justice in which we are duty bound." (refer: <http://www.aapmedianet.com.au/scripts/DisplayRelease.dll?id=345559>)

John Ferguson (National Executive Officer)

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

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

BRIEFING PAPER: 40th ANNIVERSARY OF PACEM IN TERRIS

Available on the ACSJC website - http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/issues/40th_anniversary_of_pacem_in_terris.html

OCCASIONAL PAPER: WAR ON IRAQ: IS IT JUST?

Catholic Social Justice Series ('CSJ Series') no.47 - Fr Bruce Duncan (cost \$5.50 plus postage)

SUPPLEMENTARY PAPER TO CSJ Series no.47: THE STRUGGLE TO DEVELOP A JUST WAR TRADITION IN THE WEST

Supplement by Fr Bruce Duncan available free as HTML or PDF download at

http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/publications/documentation/the_struggle_to_develop_a_just_war_tradition_in_the_west.html (PDF link at bottom of page)

BRIEFING PAPER: THE CHURCH SPEAKS ON WAR AND PEACE

Available on ACSJC website -

http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/publications/positionpapers/2003_2_25the_church_speaks_on_war_and_peace.html

OCCASIONAL PAPER: A FAIR SOCIETY? COMMONWEALTH FOR THE COMMON GOOD: TEN YEARS ON

CSJ Series no. 46 - Contributors: Veronica Brady IBVM, Michael Costigan, Julian Disney AO, Bruce Duncan CSsR, Robert Fitzgerald AM, Thomas Keneally AO, Lowitja O'Donoghue AC, John Phillips AM, John Warhurst (Cost \$5.50 plus postage)

UPDATE: SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The 1990 ACSJC Issues Paper and Social Justice Sunday Statement has been updated and is now available free as HTML or PDF download on the ACSJC website:

http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/documentation/social_justice_in_everyday_life.html (PDF link at bottom of page)

CURRENT ISSUES

See

<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/mediareleases.html>

NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE ACSJC

At the recent meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in Sydney the election of Bishops to the various Bishops' Committees were held. Bishop Christopher Saunders, Bishop of Broome, was elected the Chairman of the ACSJC. Bishop Saunders takes over from Bishop William Morris of Toowoomba in this role. Bishop Patrick Power, Auxiliary Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, is a new member of the Bishops' Committee for Justice Development, Ecology and Peace and the ACSJC.

Members of the Council and its Secretariat welcome the appointment of Bishop Saunders as Chairman and look forward to working with him on many important social justice issues. We are grateful for the support and guidance Bishop Morris has given the Council over many years and wish him well in his important work with other Conference organisations. We also welcome Bishop Power as the new Deputy Chairman of the ACSJC and member of the BCJDEP.

(<http://www.catholic.org.au/media/2003/pdfs/doc2.pdf>)

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

WEEK 2003 - 26 May to 3 June 2003

To celebrate National Sorry Day, National Reconciliation Week and the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council has included on its website a section entitled: Journey of Healing 2003: Healing the past, shaping the future. This is the theme for Sorry Day 2003. The page includes prayers and reflections. It refers and has links to resources available through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

(http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/issues/national_reconciliation_week_2003.html)

MEDIA RELEASE - BISHOPS

QUESTION SYSTEM OF

MANDATORY DETENTION - 23 May 2003

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office and the Australian

Catholic Social Justice Council joined with other Church, civic and political leaders in calling for an independent inquiry into the management of Australia's detention centres. This followed revelations on the ABC Four Corners report of mismanagement and alleged human rights abuses at the Woomera Detention Centre. Bishops Christopher Saunders and Joseph Grech urged the Australian Government to evaluate the current practices with asylum seekers, noting that the whole system of processing asylum seekers needs to change.
(http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/media_releases/2003_05_23_1053670685.html)

JUNE NOTICES

June 3: Human Rights in an Age of Terrorism - Castan Centre public lecture by Sydney University Challis Professor of International Law Ivan Shearer, in Melbourne. More info: http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/briefing/Shearer_flyer.doc

June 4 - July 9: Lecture Series "The Invasion of Iraq". Weekly lectures at 6.30 pm, Christ Lecture Theatre, Australian Catholic University, St Patrick's Campus, 115 Victoria Parade, Fitzroy. Lectures free, no bookings required. For more information phone (03) 9953 3160 or email l.martino@patrick.acu.edu.au (refer: http://www.acu.edu.au/acu_national/News__Events_Calendar/Events.cfm)

June 7: Special screening of documentary "Life and Debt", A fundraiser for Jubilee Australia-Drop the Debt with special guest speakers. 5.00pm Valhalla Cinema, 166 Glebe Point Road, Glebe, Sydney. Ph: (02) 9299 2215 for Tickets - \$15 (refer: <http://www.jubileeaustralia.org/events/events.html>)

June 7 - 28: Photo Exhibition "Children of the Gulf War", Barr Smith Library, Adelaide University. Hosted by the Women's International

League for Peace and Freedom (refer: <http://www.wilpf.org.au/default.htm>)

June 11: Address: "Violence, Dysfunction, Aboriginality" by Prof. Mick Dodson. National Press Club 12.00 - 2.00pm, Canberra. (refer: <http://www.npc.org.au/speakers.htm>)

June 13: Seminar: How Much Do We Understand People with Mental Illness and their Carers from non-English Speaking Countries?, 9.30am - 1.15pm, Meeting Room, ADEC, 13 Munro St. Coburg 3058. Cost: \$33. RSVP before 11th June Ph: (03) 9383 5566 or email hua@adec.org.au

June 20: World Refugee Day. For information about gatherings and events around Australia over the weekend of 20-22 June, visit: <http://www.worldrefugeeday.org.au>

June 21: Forum: "Wonder and the Will to Care: A Multi-Faith Forum on Ecology", 9.15am - 4.00pm, ACU Auditorium, Strathfield Campus, Sydney. Registration details, contact: Columban Peace, Ecology and Justice Centre, ph: (02) 9488 8844, email: Charlesrue@netscape.net or cmi@columban.org.au (refer: http://www.columban.org.au/cmi/cmi_pej_forum0603.htm)

June 29: Event: Jubilee Sunday organized by Jubilee Australia (refer: http://www.jubileeaustralia.org/events/jubilee_sunday.html).

(email news of your forthcoming social justice events to: admin@acsjc.org.au)

MAY NEWS MONITOR

BISHOPS QUESTION SYSTEM OF MANDATORY DETENTION: The ACSJC and the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office joined with other Church, civic and political leaders in calling for an independent inquiry into the management of Australia's detention centres.

BISHOPS COMMITTEE SEES SLOW GROWTH IN ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION:

In a Statement for National Sorry Day, the Bishops Committee for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People said that despite widespread popular support for Reconciliation, the Roadmap "has largely gone unheeded and [is] seldom travelled by policy-makers".

BISHOP EUGENE HURLEY URGES ACTION ON DETENTION CENTRES:

The bishop whose diocese includes Woomera said the allegations concerning the management of the town's detention centre have exposed the human tragedy of Australia's asylum policy.

CONCERN MOUNTS FOR ACEH AS INDONESIA LAUNCHES MILITARY OFFENSIVE:

Human rights advocates expressed concern over the situation unfolding in the Indonesian province of Aceh after the Indonesian military launched a major offensive against separatist rebels.

JESUIT CENTRE CALLS FOR INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF DETENTION CENTRES:

The Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre joined calls for an independent inquiry into the management of Australia's immigration detention centres following the screening of an expose on ABC TV's Four Corners.

SOCIAL JUSTICE RESOLUTIONS DOMINATE BISHOPS' PLENARY MEETING:

Australia's Catholic Bishops concluded their twice-yearly plenary meeting, in which they approved Racism as the subject of this year's Social Justice Sunday Statement. The Plenary also approved the mandate for Catholic Earthcare Australia.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS JOIN CALL TO LET TIMORESE STAY:

The Province Leader of the Christian Brothers in NSW/ACT urged the Federal Government to grant 1600 East Timorese refugees a special visa category to allow them to stay in Australia.

CATHOLIC WELFARE SAYS BUDGET VICTIMISES AUSTRALIA'S WORKING POOR:

Catholic Welfare Australia expressed disappointment at the Federal Government's "obsessive focus" on a Budget surplus that ignores the plight of suffering Australians.

CATHOLIC HEALTH CONDEMNS 'INDECENT' BUDGET:

Catholic Health Australia described the Federal Budget as indecent, saying it ripped nearly \$1 billion from public hospitals to put into doctors' pockets.

ADELAIDE CENTACARE SLAMS GOVT DEAF EARS ON CHILD DETAINEE REPORT:

The Centacare Catholic welfare agency condemned the Federal Government for casting doubt on the integrity of a new report on children in detention.

WELFARE CHEAT WITCH-HUNT CONCERNS CATHOLIC ORGANISATION:

Catholic Welfare Australia expressed its "grave concern" with what it sees to be Family and Community Services Minister Senator Vanstone's attempts to ensure media outlets have images of individuals rounded up in a raid near the Snowy Mountains in NSW.

BRITISH BISHOPS URGE GOVERNMENT TO FULFILL OBLIGATIONS TO REFUGEES:

The Catholic Bishops in England and Wales urged the British government to fulfill its obligations under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees.

PRINCIPAL WANTS FAIR GO FOR REFUGEE TERTIARY STUDENTS:

One of Australia's most respected high school principals is calling on the Federal Government to allow refugees to be recognised as local students when undertaking tertiary study.

STATE'S BUDGET PUTS ELECTION PROMISES BEFORE SOCIAL COMMITMENTS:

Catholic Social Services Victoria has said the politically strong Bracks Labor Government has missed an opportunity to support a social agenda that would seriously address social disadvantage in Victoria.

POPE OFFERS PORTRAIT OF IDEAL POLITICAL LEADER :

The perfect politician is a person of "perfect moral integrity" always ready "to struggle against every form of evil and injustice", according to Pope John Paul II.

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/305>

JUNE SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

June 1 - WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY:

Each year the week between the Ascension and Pentecost is set aside around the world as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The World Council of Churches chooses a theme and prepares materials to encourage individuals, groups and parishes to pray for unity among Christians.

World Council of Churches website: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/english.html>

June 3 - THE MABO DECISION:

When Torres Strait Islander Eddie Mabo presented a case to prove under the Common Law of Australia what Indigenous people have always understood, perhaps not even he could fully appreciate the significance of the High Court's landmark ruling.

When the High Court of Australia dismissed the notion of "terra-nullius", or "empty land" as a legal fiction, it

finally recognised that there were people living in Australia when the British arrived and that these people owned the land and therefore have continuing rights.

June 11 - RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT (AUST)

1975: This significant Act makes racial discrimination unlawful in Australia. It aims to ensure that we can all enjoy our human rights and freedoms in full equality regardless of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, being an immigrant (in some circumstances) or being a relative or associate of someone of a particular ethnicity or other status.

The Australian Government ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1975 and made it part of Australian law through the Racial Discrimination Act (1975).

The Convention is monitored by the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Committee examines the report cards of states which have signed and ratified the Convention every four years. This important function strengthens the effectiveness of the Convention in practical ways. The Committee's recommendations on how countries are implementing the Convention's provisions aim to encourage countries to increase their efforts.

In 2000, the Committee examined Australia's latest reports. Despite Australia's ratification of the Convention, the enactment of the Racial Discrimination Act (1975), and the fact that successive governments have publicly committed to stamping out racism, it is a sad reality that racism still exists in Australia.

National NGO Coalition Against Racism NNCAR has produced: A Fair Go - A Community Kit Against Racism. You can find the kit at:

<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

June 8 PENTECOST SUNDAY:

A symbol of Pentecost is fire. This Fire Blessing has been used as a prayer by the Aboriginal people in the Kimberley for thousands of years.

*May the fire be in your thoughts, making
them good and just,
May it protect you from all harm.*

*May the fire be in your eyes,
May it open your eyes to see what is good
in life,
May it protect you from speaking against
another.*

*May the fire be in your ears,
We pray that you may hear with deep
listening
So that you may hear the flow of water
and of all Creation and of the Dreaming.
May you be protected from gossip
And from those things that harm and
break down your family.*

*May the fire be in your arms and hands,
So that you may be of service and build
up love.
May the fire protect you from all violence.*

*May the fire be in your whole being, In
your legs and feet,
Enabling you to walk the earth with
respect and care,
So that you may journey in ways of
goodness and trust
And be protected from walking away
from what is true.*

**JUNE 12 THE BARUNGA
STATEMENT:** Aboriginal leaders
presented the Barunga Statement to the
Australian
Government calling for recognition of
Indigenous rights of traditional
ownership and self-determination.
Prime Minister Hawke agreed to
negotiate a Treaty or Makarrata with
Indigenous Peoples but the initiative
was abandoned.

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