

August 2004



# Presentation Society Justice Newsletter



Issue No. 4

## Dear Sisters and Associates

In each of our meetings we spend some time in letter writing. In the article entitled *The In Tray* (page 4) we have provided a summary of the responses to the letters we wrote at the June meeting. The responses are useful as they often provide a pointer to further action or help clarify the actual position of the person, political party or organisation. For example - while it is clear from the response that the government does not accept the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Report into Children in Detention it is good to have received a response which so clearly defines the government's position.

We have included more information on groups that are actively pursuing Election issues similar to the ones we wrote of in the June newsletter. The number of such groups is increasing in Australia and it seems to us to be a sign of the Spirit alive in our society.

Once again we have material on **The Environment, Reconciliation and West Papua**. As the issue of the maritime boundary in the Timor Sea was one about which we wrote to the Government and the Labor Party

at our June meeting we have included some information on the issue.

As our specific action from the meeting we wrote to the Queensland Bishops congratulating them on their pastoral letter, *Let the Many Coastlands be Glad*. Once again we have addressed two letters to Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs, about the Australian Government's lack of support for West Papua's efforts to pursue self-determination [this follows a report from the Pacific Islands' Forum] and another letter seeking information about the Government's position in the negotiations about the maritime boundary dispute in the Timor Sea. Finally we wrote another letter to Stephen Smith asking whether the Labor Party has accepted the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Report into Children in Detention and seeking information about the Labor Party's policy with regard to mandatory detention.

*Joan Power, Peta Anne Molloy, Anne Shay, Kathleen Tynan and Annette Shears (IPA Networker)*

**Society Justice Committee**

### Check out the newsletter on the website

Every newsletter is uploaded to the Society website. You may wish to tell others so that they can access it there -  
<http://www.presentationisters.ozehosting.com/newsletter.html>

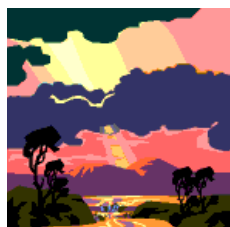
## Tabgha Program 2005

In an earlier newsletter we reported that the Tabgha Centre had moved. It is now situated in Queensland at 52 Montrose Road, Cabarlah 4352 (near Toowoomba). The following programs are being offered in 2005:

Six-week Course 27 February - 10 April  
One-week Courses 3-8 July and 11-16 September

Retreats (private or directed) are available throughout the year.

Email address: [tabgha@bigpond.com.au](mailto:tabgha@bigpond.com.au)



### Presentation Society Vision 2004-2006

- Bringing forth a sustainable society founded on:
  - \* Respect for the earth
  - \* Universal human rights
  - \* Economic justice
  - \* Culture of peace
- Listening to and hearing the cry of the earth and of those made poor
- Nurturing a contemplative stance in keeping with our Presentation identity
- Channelling our resources so we can act in partnership.

### Australian Presentation Society

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## Election Update

**W**e have come to expect various Unions, the Farmers Federation, Commerce and Industry and peak education and health groups to address key issues. What is exciting about this pre-election period is the number of smaller bodies who are seeking responses from the various candidates on a number of issues which impact on the lives of the most vulnerable in our society and on our environment.

In our June newsletter (pages 2-3) we critiqued four issues that we believe are significant for us as Christians as we prepare to vote in the Federal Election. Since then we have received similar material from a number of other agencies, with similar concerns, from across the social spectrum. Some of these have even published election kits.

The groups include:

**NetAct** – a project of Catholic Social Justice, Welfare and Educational Agencies. NetAct has papers on 14 issues, including Refugees and Asylum Seekers, the Environment, Indigenous Australians, and Australia's International Obligations at the UN.

**PolMin** – The Australian Political Ministry Network. PolMin's election agenda issues are Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Higher Education, Australia's International Obligations at the UN, and Water.

Website: <http://www.polmin.com.au>

**SAO** – the Social Action Office, an agency of the Congregational Leaders in Queensland, is conducting its campaign with the focus *Vote for the Common Good* around the issues of Affordable Housing, Water, and A Culture of Peace.

Website: [http://sao.clriq.org.au/election\\_campaign.html](http://sao.clriq.org.au/election_campaign.html)

**The National Council of Churches of Australia** have included 9 issues in their election briefing kit including Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Indigenous Australia, Poverty, and the Environment.

Website: <http://www.ncca.org.au>

**The Vote [1] No More Poverty Campaign** – a single issue campaign, sponsored by a number of religious groups including the Congregational Leaders in NSW and the Congregational Leaders of Australia.

Website: <http://www.nomorepoverty.com.au>

**The Justice Project Inc** (also a single issue campaign) has been formed to coordinate a Refugee and Asylum Seeker reform campaign. Its members include Julian Burnside, Malcolm Fraser and Robert Manne.

Website: <http://www.thejusticeproject.com.au>

**Prayer for the Election:** The Social Action Office has also distributed a prayer card for the election. A copy of the prayer is below.

## RECONCILIATION

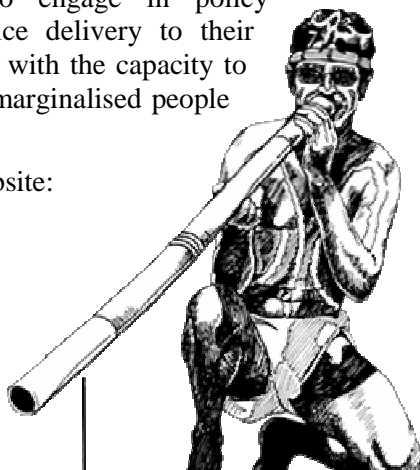
**Y**our Voice, a newly formed Aboriginal Party, says:

'It is right and fitting that we, the first people of this continent, are among the first to raise our voices for an Australia that is free, strong and just. Our efforts are starting with Indigenous people, because that is where the neglect is greatest, but they will not end there.

**Your Voice** advocates the establishment of an elected, representative body designed to provide Indigenous people with the resources to engage in policy development and service delivery to their communities as well as with the capacity to raise their voices with marginalised people across the country.'

Source: **Your Voice** website:

<http://yourvoice.org.au/>



### Prayer in Preparation for the 2004 Federal Election

**In an ever-changing and unsettled world,  
we plead with you, God of the Universe,  
to keep us focused on you  
with hearts full of hope, not fear.**

**As we prepare to elect  
a new Federal Parliament this year,  
give us wise and discerning hearts.  
Direct us to choose leaders who are  
committed to the *common good* of all,  
especially those most disadvantaged.**

**We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus  
who came that all may have life  
and have it to the full.**

**Amen.**

## The Environment on the Church's Agenda *The Earth Charter Update*

The Bishops of Queensland have issued a pastoral letter calling for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef. The letter highlights the beauty of the reef and our responsibility to care for it. The document, titled *Let the Many Coastlands be Glad*, describes the reef as “a sublime gift and blessing from God”.

The letter says “Care for the environment and a keener ecological awareness have become key moral issues for the Christian conscience.”

They note that Pope John Paul II “sees [the] growing concern for the health of the environment as one of the signs of hope that the Holy Spirit provides for our times”. The Bishops renew a call made by Church Leaders in 2002 for the Federal Government to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. (The Society Justice Committee wrote to the government earlier this year urging the same.) On a personal level the Bishops urge us all to examine our lifestyle choices and to make changes that will sustain life. They challenge us to a radical change of heart – ‘an ecological conversion’.

Source: *The Catholic Leader* 15 August 2004

A coastland concern is also being raised in Victoria where the delicate reefs around Port Phillip Heads are being threatened by the move to deepen the channels in Port Phillip Bay.

One of the ways we believe we can support changes that promote life is by our support for *The Earth Charter*.

In the May 2004 edition of the newsletter we urged you to endorse *The Earth Charter* by signing and faxing or posting the letter to The Earth Charter Secretariat in Costa Rica. Our own efforts to send this endorsement have failed. Firstly we were unable to send the fax and then our posted copy was returned. The postal address on their printed form is incorrect. So if you have sent the form by mail and had it returned you can resend it to the correct address which is:

The Earth Charter Secretariat  
c/- The Earth Council  
PO Box 138-6100  
San Jose  
Costa Rica

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## WEST PAPUA UPDATE

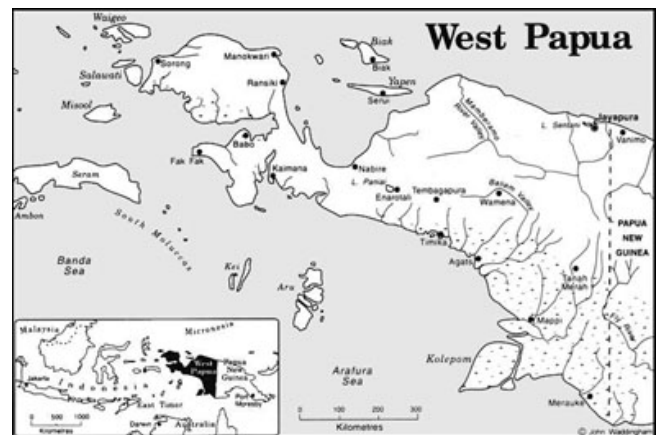
While killings, torture, the destruction of houses and gross abuses of human rights by soldiers and police continue in West Papua its right to self-determination continues to be hotly debated in Indonesian government circles and by Constitutional lawyers.

At the same time West Papuan leaders in exile are working assiduously to ensure that the plight of their people is kept before the international community.

Through the work of its international office which was established in 1992 in Sweden, the Free Papua Movement (OPM) has been actively engaged in developing a political program to support its struggle to create a sovereign and democratic state in West Papua.

There are some hopeful signs that the international community is beginning to support the West Papuan struggle. Irish parliamentarians, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, scores of NGOs and European parliamentarians, along with US Senators, to say nothing of numerous Australian groups, including ourselves, have urged the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to review the world's role in the 1969 referendum. In March this year a significant breakthrough occurred when a large and widely representative delegation met members of the British Foreign Office which led to a substantial dialogue.

A recent gathering of chiefs and leaders who met at a



secret congress near the West Papua border in Wewak PNG decided to lay down arms and pursue self-determination from Indonesia through peaceful means. Their decision has been supported by Vanuatu's offer to mediate talks between West Papua and Indonesia over their political future. Indonesia has expressed interest in this offer. Encouragingly, the PNG Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, has also given cautious support to brokering a political solution between West Papua and Indonesia.

Not all has been positive, however. It was a great disappointment to the West Papuan separatist movement that the recent Pacific Islands Forum dropped any reference to West Papua from the communiqué which was issued at its recent forum held in Samoa. One observer noted that it is often the powerful white nations at the Forum, namely Australia and New Zealand, who are most resistant to such an inclusion.

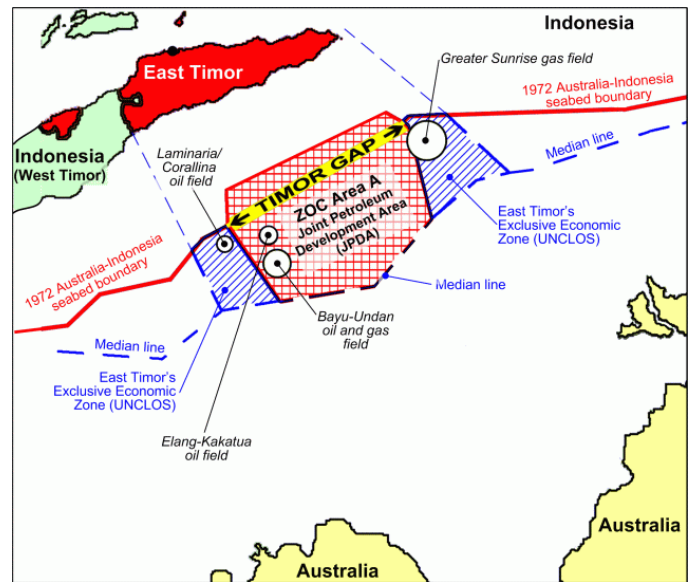
## EAST TIMOR – A Fair Go!

In the June newsletter we mentioned that the Committee had written to both Alexander Downer and Kevin Rudd re the disputed areas of the Timor Sea and the ongoing debate (refer to *The 'In Tray'* below).

In the *Catholic News* 6/08/04, Josephite Sr Susan Connolly has expressed her dismay at the 'one-sided view' being taken by the Murdoch press in particular, on the sea boundaries dispute between Australia and East Timor.

*The Age* (Thursday 12 August 2004) reported that a new deal over the Timor Sea oil and gas reserves has been struck. Even though all of the gas is much closer to East Timor, the current Australian Government is unwilling to change the maritime boundary and Australia stands to gain most in the present arrangement. The new deal increases what East Timor would receive but the report does not say by how much; neither do we know if this deal refers to all of the oil and gas reserves or to a part only. While the East Timorese Government wants to have meetings with the Australian Government once a month, the latter wants to meet once every six months and this would delay the process of finalising boundaries.

The policy of the Labor Party is to 'negotiate in good faith with the Government of East Timor, in full accordance with International Law and all its implicat-



ions, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea... The conclusion of the maritime boundary should be based on the joint aspirations of both countries.'

The Greens policy is to negotiate 'in good faith with the East Timorese Government to determine maritime boundaries in accordance with the median line principles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea' and to rapidly establish 'fair maritime boundaries to give East Timor a just share of the revenue from oil and gas fields under the Timor Sea and the opportunity to escape continued debt and poverty.'

### The 'In Tray'

- Archbishop Carroll thanked the Society Justice Committee for our letter affirming the Australian Bishops' Conference for their Statement on the Election.
- Letters were sent to Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Kevin Rudd, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, expressing concern re the disputed areas of the Timor Sea and recommending that the dispute be settled quickly and in accordance with the principles of International Law. In his reply, Mr Rudd thanked us for the suggestions and outlined the Labor Party policy to settle the permanent border within 3 to 5 years and to be generous in assisting the East Timorese people as they work towards an independent future. No reply has been received from Mr Downer at this point of time.
- The Committee also wrote to Mr Alexander Downer expressing concern about the NGOs in Indonesia who appear to have been put on a "Watch List", including organisations and individuals who advocate human rights. Mr Craig Chittick, Director of the Indonesia Section of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, responded. He thanked the Committee and presented the government's understanding that a recent refusal to renew a work permit does not reflect an effort to restrict freedom of speech in Indonesia.
- Letters to Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, and to Stephen Smith, Shadow Minister, expressed concern about the abuse of children in detention centres as detailed in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Report into Children in Detention. We asked the Minister to remove these children – *at that time more than 100* – from detention. Garry Fleming, from the Detention Policy Branch, replied on behalf of Senator Vanstone, stating that the Government does not accept the findings and recommendations of this report. He claimed that at 5 July 2004 there was **only one child** in a mainland detention centre who came unauthorised by boat! At this date, no reply has been received from Mr Smith.