



# Presentation Society Justice Newsletter



Issue No. 4

## Dear Sisters and Associates

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, the International Day for Indigenous People is celebrated. With this in mind, in this issue we revisit the topics of Reconciliation (page 3) and West Papua (page 4) in the short reading and suggested actions on page 4. Issue two of our Newsletter this year looked at Fair Trade. With another round of Trade talks coming up and the minister for Trade, Mark Vaile, calling for public comment on Australia's approach to the 5<sup>th</sup> World Trade Organisation meeting in September, we include some background information and an action (pages 1 & 2) Our effort to live sustainably is revisited with news of adaptations of *The Earth Charter* for young people on page 3. There is also a 'good news' item on biodegradable cornstarch bags as an alternative to plastic bags.

Kathleen Tynan , Joan Power, Annette Shears

## Big Noise about Fair Trade Petitions

Oxfam have organised an international petition about Fair Trade. Worldwide, over 700,000 people have signed up to the **Big Noise** petition. In Australia, already more than 17,000 people have signed the petition. Oxfam want to get 50,000 Australians and 3 million people worldwide signed up by September. They will then be taking these names and this fantastic level of support to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting and demanding that they act to make trade fair.

To make trade fair the WTO must act to stop the European Union and the USA providing massive subsidies to their farmers that create barriers to poor countries exporting their agricultural products. Rich countries need to stop dumping heavily subsidised agricultural products on the world market.

Farmers in the developing world need to obtain a fair price for their produce - whether it's for coffee, rice, sugar or corn. In addition, the patent rules need changing so that people in poor countries can get the medicines needed to treat Malaria, HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis.

You can help achieve these changes by getting friends to sign the **Big Noise** petition about fair trade. Get clubs, local shops, your church and union to take copies of the petition. A copy of the Oxfam petition is enclosed.

Please collect as many signatures as possible and return the petition to the address on the petition by the end of August.

## *Good News for the Environment*

### - Biodegradable Plastic Bags

The Gold Coast City Council (Qld) has begun trialing biodegradable cornstarch dog-waste bags in dog exercise areas. This is for a trial period.

These bags break down in 4-6 weeks, thus reducing litter but they can also be digested and therefore present no risk to marine life.

The Council reported that because the bags are imported they are considerably more expensive so they need to be widely accepted and to work well before the Council considers using them on a permanent basis.

Meanwhile certain bait shops are now selling their bait in biodegradable plastic bags.

**Action:** Ask your local council about introducing similar bags.

## FAIR TRADE - A MATTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS

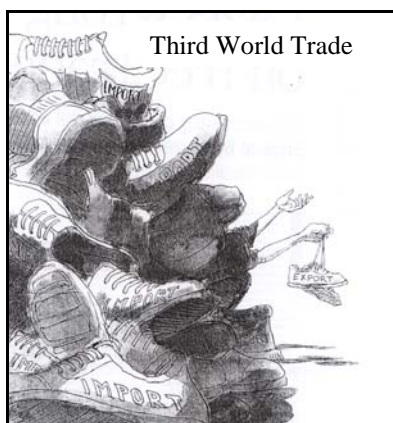
Trade Minister Mark Vaile has called for public comment on Australia's approach to the 5th World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference to be held in Cancun, Mexico, from 10 to 14 September. It is important that they receive comments from a wide range of community organisations and individuals.

The Ministerial Conference will discuss ongoing negotiations on trade in goods, trade in services (GATS) and trade in agriculture. The issue of changes to the WTO Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS) to allow developing country governments to get access to affordable medicines has still not been resolved. There are also proposals for new WTO agreements on Investment, Competition Policy and Government Procurement, which have many features in common with the infamous Multi-lateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) which attempted to remove the right of governments to regulate transnational investment and was defeated by community campaigning in 1998.

Governments of developing countries are strongly critical of the lack of progress on access to affordable medicines. They do not want to open up their vulnerable agricultural sectors to heavily subsidised products from the US and Europe, which threaten their food security. They do not wish to expand the GATS agreement to include essential public services. They are also opposing the proposals for new WTO agreements, which would remove their right to regulate investment to ensure that it contributes to local development. These criticisms are shared by many community organisations.

Our government's ministerial meeting in August will finalise Australia's position for the September meeting in Mexico. Please write to Mark Vaile and/or your local member by August 15 expressing some of the above concerns.

A sample letter is included. It is suggested that you write in longhand and adapt the letter to suit your style.



## SAMPLE LETTER

The Hon Mark Vaile MP  
Minister for Trade  
Parliament House  
Canberra [email: Mark.Vaile.MP@aph.gov.au]

Dear Mr Vaile

Re GATS negotiations

I was pleased to see that you have responded to community concern by publishing Australia's initial offers in the GATS negotiations, and that these do not contain new offers on health, education, water for human use, postal or audio-visual services, the Foreign Investment Review Board or levels of Australian ownership of Telstra.

However I am still concerned that the GATS negotiations are proceeding without any review of the social and economic impact of the existing agreement. I also note that the initial offers can be changed or withdrawn at any time. There has been no publication of Australia's requests to other countries in the negotiations, including requests to developing countries, which could have devastating impacts. I believe that GATS and other trade agreements should be debated and ratified by parliament, not by Cabinet.

I note that the government background paper on the offers acknowledges that the GATS framework negotiations on domestic regulations and subsidies could reduce the right of governments to regulate services, and to fund and provide public services. I urge you not to support any changes which could reduce those rights.

I request

- a review of the social and economic impact of the existing GATS agreement before new commitments are made;
- publication of any proposed changes to the Australian government's offer in the course of the negotiations, and public parliamentary debate of such changes before they are submitted in the negotiations;
- publication of Australia's GATS initial negotiating requests to other governments, and publication of any subsequent requests in the negotiations
- no reduction in the ability of governments to regulate services through a "least trade restrictive test"
- clear exclusion of health, education, postal, water and other public services from the GATS agreement;
- no definition of government funding of public services as "subsidies" which would reduce the right of governments to provide and fund public services
- GATS and other trade agreements to be ratified by parliament, not by Cabinet.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely  
Name and Address

## Adaptations of the Earth Charter for Younger People

It has been said that, in the years to come, the Earth Charter, launched at the Hague in 2000, will be considered of equal importance to the Declaration of Human Rights. Each, in response to a particular moment in history, proposes the principles for the well-being of the global society.

Through the pages of this Newsletter we have urged Presentation People to deepen our commitment to a life-style which reflects the Earth Charter's basic principles of respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace.

The more recent publication of adaptations of the Earth Charter for young people and children is a welcome resource for all who have a sense of urgency for sustainable living and are involved in the education of the young.

The following is a sample of the adaptations that have been made:

### Original Principle 9

*Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social and environmental imperative*

- a) Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.
- b) Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.
- c) Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and pursue their aspirations.

### Adaptation for young people

*Help eliminate poverty in this world. No reason can justify the existence of the poor.*

- Everybody has the right to drinkable water, clean air, sufficient food, uncontaminated soil, adequate housing and safe sanitation.
- Everybody must have the education and the resources necessary to lead a decent life.
- Those people who are unable to look after themselves must be suitably cared for.
- The neglected and needy must be those who receive most help.

### Adaptation for younger children

*You will help to see that there are no poor*

- Everybody must have what they need to live properly.
- All children must have schools.
- People in need must get the most help.



Copies of these adaptations can be obtained by contacting Joan Power  
phone: 03 9529 8834; fax: 03 9529 3995;  
email: [jpower@netspace.net.au](mailto:jpower@netspace.net.au)

## Getting Reconciliation on the Agenda Again

“The road to national reconciliation is a long and extraordinarily difficult one. There are so many challenges to be met, and obstacles to be overcome – all the problems of the spirit, and all the material disadvantages flowing from past dispossession, oppression and injustice. I have often said that I believe that true and lasting reconciliation, at a national level, will not be won unless and until it is apparent that we are making real progress towards the position where the true prospects of the ordinary indigenous baby born in this country are at least comparable to those of a non-indigenous one.”

Sir William Deane, Opening of the Queen's Trust Indigenous Leaders' Program, Brisbane, 6 April 2000

Most of us would heartily agree with Sir William Deane's comments and yet it would seem that the Reconciliation issue has fallen off our national agenda. Perhaps we can rekindle our commitment as we move towards the end of the UN Decade of the World's Indigenous People 1995 – 2004.

**August 9 - the International Day of the World's Indigenous People** - could serve as a day to recommit ourselves to Reconciliation. (cont. page 4)

## Getting Reconciliation on the Agenda Again (continued)

### Some suggested actions

Write to the Federal Minister for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Mr. Philip Ruddock, urging him to put Aboriginal Reconciliation back on the national agenda and into national consciousness, especially in the light of the Howard Government's commitment on its re-election in 2001. In your local community, parish or other group prepare a statement recognising the traditional custodians of the land on which your home, church, meeting place is built.

- Research the relevant information
- Prepare a draft
- Discuss and edit it together
- Frame it and hang it in a prominent position
- Communicate with the local indigenous people.

The statement could follow the pattern:

*We acknowledge the ..... people as the original custodians of the land on which ..... is built*

*We regret that .....*

*We commit ourselves to .....*

## UPDATE ON WEST PAPUA

Our May newsletter noted that civil society organizations in West Papua are trying to create a Zone of Peace in the Province. Although the Papuans and the provincial legislature have called upon the Government in Jakarta to declare Papua a Peace Zone, the Government seems reluctant to do so.

A special autonomy law for Papua was passed in October 2001. This law has the support of the European Union, of other members of the international Community and of the Government in Papua, but not the support of the Papuans themselves who want self-determination. However, this law cannot be implemented as the central Government has been delaying issuing the regulation for the establishment of the Papuan People's Assembly. Meanwhile, President Megawati has issued a presidential instruction on the acceleration of the division of Papua into three smaller provinces. In late June, an analysis of the legal defects of the attempt to divide Papua was done by Harum Abrasid, Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Indonesia, and presented in Berlin. (reference *The Jakarta Post*).

At the same time, the July edition of 'New Internationalist' notes that human rights abuses in West Papua continue and the military, who are mostly responsible for these abuses, are not being held to account by Indonesia's Justice system. Lenient sentences have been given to seven officers from Kopassus for their assassination of West Papuan Independence leader, Theys Eluay in November 2001. 'The Age (5-7-03) reported that Indonesian police say they killed one man and wounded two others when they shot at five men raising the Morning Star flag, the symbol of Independence for Papua province.

## A CHANCE TO SUPPORT WEST PAPUA

A number of Religious Congregations and Justice Groups in Victoria have supported an initiative of the Australia West Papua Association (Central Highlands Group) to sponsor six young Papuans to further their studies in Australia. The venture has involved much research and consultation. A substantial sum of money has been raised to cover travel, keep and study expenses. The young people will undertake a bridging Year 12 in Catholic Schools in Ballarat before going on to Tertiary studies. However, an unexpected cost of \$2,000.00 has been incurred to meet Medicare compliance costs. In addition, many expensive overseas phone calls have been made in order to ensure that students are well chosen and that the venture is successful.

**Our suggestion is .....** Given that we have over 200 Presentation Communities and several Associates groups, **if each one could donate \$10.00 to this cause** we would ease the burden and anxiety of the organisers who have devoted long hours to the project.

Donations can be forwarded to Kathleen Tynan and cheques made out to Presentation Sisters with an accompanying note to indicate its purpose.

Thank you for your interest and consideration of this suggestion.