



Presentation Society Justice Newsletter



Issue No. 2

Dear Sisters and Associates

We begin this newsletter by paying tribute to Angela Cameron pbvm who died so suddenly and unexpectedly on Palm Sunday (3 April). Angela was Society President from 1991 to 1996. During this period she worked with passion and vision to bring issues concerning the cry of the earth and the cry of those made poor to the heart of our working together as PBVM Society. Angela was a woman whose vision encompassed the Universe and the interconnectedness of all life. We believe that we are now connected with Angela in a new way as she has entered into the fulness of life.

In this issue of the newsletter we have included more information about:

- The Earth Charter – an invitation to endorse it
- The International Year of Rice
- The next wave of refugees
- West Papua
- Reconciliation – the road gets rockier

We have begun to prepare some material about issues that we believe we need to look at before the federal election and we will send this out later.

At our April meeting we, as the Society Justice Committee, endorsed the Earth Charter. We also wrote letters to various members of parliament regarding human rights violations in West Papua, the abolition of ATSIC, Australia's response to HIV/AIDS in PNG, and the need for the government to pressure the Indonesian government to send General Wiranto to East Timor to face human rights abuse charges.

No one of us can do everything but it is encouraging to know that together we can make a difference. Remember sometimes it is the last grain of sand which causes the landslide.

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

Society Justice Committee

INVITATION TO ENDORSE THE EARTH CHARTER

Endorsement of the Earth Charter by individuals or organisations signifies a commitment to the spirit and aims of the document. The Earth Charter initiative is seeking to develop a worldwide base of support for the Earth Charter. The initiative is promoting the use, implementation and endorsement of the Earth Charter by individuals and organisations in all sectors of society. Endorsement of the document by individuals and groups in civil society and by businesses and governments builds support for environmental protection and development of a just, sustainable and peaceful world.

The Earth Charter can be endorsed by going to the website of the Earth Charter in Australia which is www.earthcharter.org.au and then clicking on the heading *Endorse the Earth Charter*. It is also worthwhile to click on the heading which allows you to scroll through the names of all those individuals and groups who have already endorsed the Earth Charter. The Society Justice Committee has just added its name to the list. For those individuals or groups who do not have access to the internet a copy of a fax that can be sent to the Earth Charter Secretariat is enclosed.

Angela Cameron RIP



Angela's death speaks to us
Of the wonder of being human
In a universe so vast and so magnificent
And of our existence within a mystery
and a power
That we cannot understand or put into
words.
In a very real sense this vast universe
came alive and became aware in
Angela.
She lived and loved in God,
God lived and loved in her,
And in death she lives on in God.

[adapted from the prayer used at the gathering the night before Angela's funeral]

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International Year of Rice 2004 – *Rice is Life*

Issues that impact on Health and Income

Towards the end of the 20th century, Australia, along with most countries, signed an agreement to work towards achieving the Millennium Goals for improving the life of the poorer nations. The first of these is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. More than half the world's population depends on rice for food and employment, so it is significant that the UN has named 2004 as the International Year of Rice.

As scientists, politicians, economists and corporations seek to expand the growth of rice, their work highlights issues related to our concern for the earth and those made poor:

- Increased production can mean lower prices for farmers
- Removal of trade protection exposes small farmers to unfair competition with large business groups
- Pesticides and genetic modification are costly and threaten the health of farmers and consumers and affect the long-term productivity of the soil
- Genetic modification and use of only one rice variety ignore the accumulated wisdom of generations of farmers
- Increased national prosperity leads to expansion of cities and other industries, possibly reducing the availability of fertile land for cultivation.

It is likely that water will become less available in the near future. Water management is essential for maintaining rice production.



Rice is deeply embedded in the culture of the 2/3 world countries. The intense labour needed for the cultivation of rice requires people in clusters of villages to work together. Rice has moved beyond being merely an economic item; rice has inspired songs, paintings, stories. In Australia, as in many other countries, people use rice as a metaphor for life, fertility and abundance. (Confetti is a paper version of rice!!!)

REFUGEES - The next wave

Marat Fomenko takes one last look over the deserted fields of his homeland before indicating to his wife and children that it is time to leave. The bleak landscape before his eyes is littered with fragments of abandoned machinery. Twenty-five years ago, looking out from his home, Marat could see the Aral Sea, once the lifeblood of the region and the fourth biggest lake in the world. For Marat is a fisherman, not a farmer, and the "fields" he overlooks were once part of a river system but are now "planted" with the rusted hulks of disused ships. Marat and his family will never return to their dying homeland in **Kazakhstan**. The vanishing Aral Sea (sucked dry by the diverting of rivers that fed it – diverted to irrigate the pesticide-soaked cotton fields upstream in Uzbekistan) has triggered ecological disaster and a 30-fold increase in disease.

Closer to us here in Australia, Paani is facing the problem of too much water, for his homeland is gradually being drowned by the Pacific Ocean. Already the lowland coconut plantation farmlands of **Tuvalu** are being swamped by the rising sea. Nearby islets have vanished already, while the creeping saltwater contaminates precious drinking supplies and stunts crop

growth. Next year Paani and his family will be forced to abandon their homeland and take advantage of a gracious offer of a new start from the government of New Zealand. (The present Australian Government has a policy of not accepting environmental refugees.)

Marat, Paani and their families are just a few of the estimated 25 million **environmental refugees** worldwide who have been forced to abandon their lands through a complex myriad of causes involving flooding, drought, soil erosion, deforestation, earthquakes, rising sea levels induced by climatic change... However, governments steadfastly ignore these refugees who have been forced to flee their homes because of the "persecution" of a degraded environment which brings greatly increased levels of disease.

According to Norman Myers of Oxford University, at a conservative estimate, climate change will increase the number of environmental refugees six-fold over the next fifty years to 150 million. In China, the government estimates that some 30 million people are already being displaced by the impacts of climate change. The Bangladeshi Environment Minister, Mrs Sajeeda Choudhury, has said that if climate change causes sea levels to rise in line with scientific predictions, her country will have millions of homeless people within the next few decades.

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West Papua

A number of issues continue to be of concern ...



Human Rights

- The on-going and well documented violations of human rights in West Papua continues to have a direct and devastating impact on the lives of our near neighbours, the West Papuans.
- Procrastination by the Indonesian House of Representatives to pass the Bill establishing a Commission on truth and reconciliation means that, with the forthcoming elections, the whole process could have to start all over again. In the meantime the West Papuans will continue to suffer.

The lack of will on the part of the Indonesian Government to improve human rights may well cause those who feel their rights are being ignored to fight even more vigorously for separation from Indonesia.

West Papua - a natural resource treasure trove

West Papua is rich in natural resources: lush forests of old-growth timber, latent precious metals and untapped reserves of oil and natural gas. These resources could be the answer to the provinces poverty woes. On the other hand, as environmentalists and many others would say, large scale resource extraction mostly benefits big multinational corporations and leaves local people and their land impoverished.

REFUGEES – the next wave *Cont'd from page 2*

Total refugees foreseen by 2050

China	30,000,000
India	30,000,000
Bangladesh	15,000,000
Egypt	14,000,000
Other delta areas and coastal zones	10,000,000
Island states	1,000,000
Agriculturally dislocated areas	50,000,000
TOTAL	150,000,000



- How can I change my lifestyle so that I contribute as little as possible to global warming?
- Do I catch public transport or car pool when possible?
- Can I cut down on my use of air conditioning or heating?
- Do I put on one full load of washing in the machine OR 2 or 3 small loads?
- Is it practical, where I live, to use solar energy?

Presidential Election - 5 July

The recent nomination of General Wiranto, the commander-in-chief of Indonesia's armed forces at the time of East Timor's 1999 vote for independence and the subsequent gross violations of human rights, has major implications for Aceh and West Papua. Wiranto needs to be brought to justice for crimes committed in East Timor – not presented as a Presidential candidate.

HIV/AIDS

Reports indicate that HIV/AIDS cases in West Papua continue to soar. While official figures are significant enough, it is said that the actual figures could be ten times higher. Some education programs and counselling services are being piloted and harm-reduction measures are being introduced in some prisons. Sharing of needles and unsafe sexual practices including infected comfort women are the major causes of the alarmingly high incidences of HIV/AIDS in West Papua.

West Papua Refugees in PNG

There have been three waves of refugees or migrations numbering thousands of people from West Papua to Vanimo in Papua New Guinea. Vanimo is the capital of Sandaun Province which is about 20 minutes by plane from Aitape. The formerly protective government of PNG is no longer as friendly to the refugees as it was. Many have been repatriated, often to be met with persecution, and those who remain suffer from poverty and lack of education. With on-going militia activity over the border the situation is a challenging one for PNG.

An Action on behalf of West Papua

Write a short letter to your Federal Member of Parliament and the Leaders of the major Parties asking:

- Do you believe the people of West Papua have the right to self-determination?
- How would your party help achieve this?

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear

I am concerned about Australia's policy regarding West Papua and the violation of human rights there.

I am a voter [in the electorate of ...] OR [in your electorate]. I have two questions: (*see above*)

I would be grateful for your response.

Yours faithfully

..... name

..... address

Reconciliation set-back – ATSIC abolished



Shane Wood cfc, from the Broome Diocese commenting on the abolition of ATSIC, said that it represented a ‘drastic reversal for Indigenous people across Australia that will do untold damage to the process of reconciliation’. (*Catholic News* 20/04/04)

In a recent edition of *Insight*, (SBS 7.30pm 27/04/04) a group of Aboriginal Australians expressed their pain and frustration at once again having their views ignored. Their belief was that this government has always bitterly opposed ATSIC, scapegoating it for its own failures. Phil Glendenning (ANTaR) stated: ‘This government and its mainstream departments have massively failed Indigenous Australians.’

The Aborigines on SBS were calling for more say in their affairs, not less. ‘Evidence has shown that full and effective Indigenous involvement in decision-making, strengthening of Indigenous organisations and accountability of mainstream departments are crucial issues in tackling Indigenous disadvantage.’ (ANTaR 15/04/04) Aboriginal self-determination lies at the centre

of Indigenous identity and progress. This self-determination is being seriously eroded. Shane Wood cfc sees that ‘we are in danger of regressing to the days when governments thought that they knew what was best for Indigenous people’. (*Catholic News* 20/04/04)

The government’s emphasis on practical reconciliation gives the illusion of equality whilst perpetuating Indigenous people’s position on the bottom rung of society. A telling statistic was noted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 21/02/04: ‘Thirty years ago the life expectancy of North American Indians and New Zealand Maoris was about a decade lower than their non-Indigenous fellow citizens. Australian Aborigines could expect to live, on average, 20 years less than white Australians.’ While over the past thirty years, the gap in Canada, the US and New Zealand has narrowed to between 5 to 7 years, in Australia there is no change. There is still a 20 year gap between black and white life expectancy.

ACT NOW FOR RECONCILIATION

As we approach Sorry Day on 26 May, you might consider writing to your local Federal member to oppose any legislation introduced by the government to abolish ATSIC without an appropriate, alternative Indigenous representative body to replace it.

Dear

We strongly object to the decision by the Federal Government to abolish ATSIC without adequate consultation with Indigenous people whose hurt, anger and frustration at this move is understandable. Moving responsibility back to mainstream departments is a regressive and paternalistic step which damages the already fragile reconciliation process.

It is obvious that ATSIC has been blamed for the government’s failure in Indigenous affairs. ANTaR notes that ‘Indigenous disadvantage has worsened under the government’s practical reconciliation process’. Aboriginal self-determination which lies at the heart of indigenous identity and progress must be nurtured and increased, not undermined and eroded.

We call on you to oppose any legislation which abolishes ATSIC without replacing it with an appropriate, alternative representative body which increases Aboriginal self-determination.

Celebrate World Environment Day

5 June

Take time to be in nature — go for a walk and observe the beauty around you. Reflect on how your lifestyle protects nature for another generation.



We will not care for what we do not know, and what we do not know we do not experience.

Sallie McFague