



Presentation Society Justice Newsletter



Issue No. 5

Dear Sisters and Associates

The Federal Election has come and gone since our last newsletter. As we reflected back on the campaign run by the major parties and the four issues we saw (and still see) as needing a Christian critique, namely:

- the ever-widening gap between the poor and the wealthy in Australia
- Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers
- Australia's treatment of and policies for Indigenous people
- Australia's lack of commitment to global environment issues

It became transparently clear that these issues hardly surfaced in the mainstream political agenda.

This does not deter us in our belief that these issues are significant and need our continued effort to effect some change for the benefit of those who are marginalised, especially by our Government's policies.

In this issue we have concentrated on aspects of poverty, the environment and human rights, including updates on The Timor Sea Maritime Boundary dispute, West Papua and the issue of Stolen Wages.

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Poverty has many faces

“I wasn't able to stay on at school because my parents couldn't afford the cost, because some days we only have enough to eat for one meal. I often go to the bar and wait for what's left over from the tourists' meals so that I can fill my stomach, even if it's no good. What's important is to fill my stomach, never mind anything else. In the future I'd like to become a mechanic, in order to earn my living and help those who haven't got enough. I know I'm not going to stay like this, if I do, I'll have no dignity.” - Sanousi, aged 10, Mali, West Africa

“My mum makes about \$200 a week and she's got four kids to feed on that. It just isn't enough. Last week the electricity bill came in. It just sent Mum over the top. We couldn't afford to eat that night. Our fridge is really old and it looks as though it will pack it in at any moment. I don't know how we'll cope when it does. We had a school camp last week and it was going to cost \$55. I didn't even bother asking if I could go. It would just upset Mum even more. She wants us to be able to do normal stuff but she just hasn't got the money...”

- Sara, aged 12, outer suburbs of a capital city in Australia

OzSpirit 12/10/04

The United Nations estimates that some 2.8 billion people, or almost 44 per cent of the world's population, live on less than one dollar a day.

UN officials say that the world is falling behind in its efforts to achieve the goals set four years ago for the year 2015: to halve the number of people living in dire poverty, ensure that children have basic schooling, and curb the AIDS epidemic.

“Globalization's benefits have been unevenly distributed. Many of its burdens have fallen on those who can least protect themselves. Too many people, particularly in developing countries, feel excluded and threatened by globalization. They feel they are the servants of the masters when it should be the other way around.”

- Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

Australia's contribution to alleviating world poverty

Between 1971 and 1985, Australian aid as a percentage of our Gross National Income (GNI) varied between 0.40 per cent and 0.92 per cent. However, the last five government budgets have allocated the least amount of aid in the previous 35 years, at 0.25 per cent to 0.26 per cent of GNI. By comparison, Norway gave 0.92 per cent of GNI, Denmark 0.84 per cent, the Netherlands 0.81 per cent.

- *Justice Trends*, September 2004

Let us never forget that hunger is the cruellest of all weapons of mass destruction. Hunger continues to kill 24,000 people a day and 11 children every minute.

Lula da Silva, President of Brazil

Justice and Human Rights

“No one can deny that the aspiration to peace is rooted in the heart of a large part of humanity. That is exactly the ardent desire that spurs people to seek every possible path to a better future for one and all. We are ever more convinced that we must fight the evil of war at its roots, for peace is not only the absence of conflict; it is also a long-term dynamic and participatory process that involves every social class, from families to schools and the various institutions and national and international bodies. We can and must build a culture of peace together that will prevent recourse to arms and all forms of violence. To this end, gestures and efforts for forgiveness and reconciliation must be encouraged; it is essential to overcome disagreement and division that would otherwise be perpetuated with no prospect of a solution. Then it is necessary to reaffirm vigorously that there can be no true peace without justice and respect for human rights.” - Pope John Paul II

The distance between the Christian ideal, expressed above and the reality in our country is illustrated in the following situation:

On 7 October, the Judges of the Australian High Court ruled unanimously that, under Australian law, it is legal to keep children in detention indefinitely – with no prospect of release. At this date (7 October), the Australian Government has 87 children held in various places of detention – 76 of them in prisons with guards.

Our Near Northern Neighbours

The injunction of many justice movements says, “Think globally, act locally”. As Australians we have a particular concern for our near northern neighbours and so we continue to report on happenings in West Papua and Timor-Leste.

In a reply to our letter to the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Federal Government stated its position towards West Papua: “The Australian Government strongly supports Indonesia’s territorial integrity, including sovereignty over Papua.” This stance is in contradiction to the loudly articulated aspirations of the West Papuans themselves for the right to self-determination.

In a recent address to the United Nations

General Assembly in New York the Vanuatu Minister for Foreign Affairs made a passionate speech raising the West Papuan issue calling on the UN to include West Papua on its agenda for action. This speech followed the approval of the Vanuatu Government for a West Papuan freedom fighters’ office to be opened in their country and for West Papuans to raise funds for their cause. So, it is the island state of Vanuatu which is giving unprecedented support to this struggling country whose every characteristic and culture identifies them as Melanesian and not Malay.

In the meantime, the people of West Papua continue to suffer human rights’ abuses. Conflicting reports are being received about the attempted repatriation of 300 West Papuan refugees, known as border crossers, from Vanimo in Papua New Guinea to East Awim in the Western Province of West Papua. Whilst the PNG government claims the refugees have agreed to return, many other sources indicate that the

refugees are very reluctant to do so. Their major fear is that they will “disappear” as has happened to many of their compatriots in the past.

East Timor

The reluctance of the Australian Government to negotiate with our other northern neighbour, Timor-Leste, over its maritime boundaries continues. The present complex situation has both historical and political reasons which are related to the revenue from the rich oil and natural gas deposits and which are determined by maritime boundaries. Historically, Australia has negotiated with Indonesia, Portugal and the Netherlands. Today, the solution to the maritime boundaries must be negotiated between Timor-Leste and Indonesia and between Timor-Leste and Australia.

As Frank Brennan SJ in the paper “*The Timor Sea’s Oil and Gas: What’s Fair?*” says

In the final analysis as Australians we should be concerned that the decision is a just one... Just a fair go for all three parties, including one that is the smallest, poorest and newest in the region.

The aspirations of the East Timorese are expressed in the statement of Jose Teixeira, Timor-Leste Secretary of State for Investment (*ABC Four Corners Forum*, 10 May 2004)

Our economic independence is what we are striving for. Thank you for your view of charitable aid, but it does nothing for people’s dignity. We are only asking for justice, for our right to self-determination which every people in the world have a right to. We are not asking the Australian Government to rollover to our demands. We are asking for negotiations in good faith within a reasonable time period, and in accordance with the principles of international law. If we are unable to agree after a reasonable period of negotiations, then we ask that Australia commit itself to an internationally recognised mechanism of arbitration of its choosing. We are only asking for a fair go, mate.

Aboriginal RECONCILIATION Update

Wik regain their land

After more than a decade of struggle, the Wik people have regained about 75% of the total land area and waters claimed by the indigenous owners. Justice Richard Cooper congratulated the parties involved for reaching agreement outside the court. It is the first claim over land in the state of Queensland subject to pastoral leases.

John Fraser who led the negotiations with the traditional owners on behalf of Strathburn station said that the real breakthrough came when they gagged the lawyers and could talk about the issues. His initial panic that he would lose the station subsided when the Wik people made it clear they wanted the pastoralists to stay. The Wik people now hope to have their claim realised over the remaining areas which include pastoral and bauxite mining leases.

- *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14/10/04

Stolen Wages

For decades governments throughout Australia literally stole or misappropriated the money of Aboriginal people who were under their care and protection. The sum runs to hundreds of millions of dollars and includes wages earned for forced or indentured labour or other monies such as child endowment payments. This was possible because governments directly controlled Aboriginal wages and entitlements.

Indigenous affairs has historically been the responsibility of the State governments, except for the Northern Territory where the Commonwealth had responsibility from 1911 to 1978. This means that the exact nature and extent of monies stolen depends on the state or territory involved. Currently there are active campaigns in Queensland, Victoria and NSW on the stolen wages issue and work is underway to research and address the issue in other States and Territories.

ACTION

Write to your local member in State Parliament asking what is being done in your State about the issue of stolen wages.

CAN YOU HELP?

There are currently over 80 asylum seekers still imprisoned on Nauru. Some of these people do not know whether they will be deported to the dangerous situations in Afghanistan and Iraq, or whether they will remain indefinitely in detention. In their anxiety and despair, contact with legal officers and supporters is vital. Phone cards enable them to make these calls. Your donations of money to local support groups enable the supply of cards to continue.

Please send donations to The Romero Centre, PO Box 6115, Buranda Qld 4102 or to a support group in your area.

The Church continues to speak on Environment issues facing our country

In the last edition of the newsletter there was an article about the pastoral letter from the Queensland Bishops calling for the protection of the Barrier Reef. Just this month another group of Bishops have issued a statement about the Murray-Darling Basin, also a major environmental issue.

On 11 October three Bishops whose dioceses take in the Murray-Darling Basin took to the deck of a paddle-steamer to launch a pastoral statement on the care and the future of the troubled great river system, which has been described as 'Australia's worst ecological disaster'. Catholic Earthcare Australia chair, Bishop Christopher Toohey of Wilcannia-Forbes, launched the document from the Murray port of Echuca with Bishops Gerard Hanna (Wagga Wagga) and Peter Connors (Ballarat).

The document, an initiative of Catholic Earthcare Australia, has been endorsed by the eleven Bishops of the Murray-Darling Basin. In it, the Bishops note that the Murray-Darling Basin is widely recognised as a region that is critically important in economic, cultural and ecological terms.

In the statement the Bishops say that "The restoration of the health of the Murray and the other rivers of the Basin is one of the most urgent



issues facing our country. We are glad to say that it has been taken up vigorously by numbers of landholders, scientists, community leaders, environmental groups and politicians. We respect the enormous amount of community work already done. But we believe that all Australians need to become involved. We see its life-giving waters as a precious gift of God. We see human beings as responsible before God for the well-being of the river system."

It is hoped that each diocese in the Basin will take up the issues raised in the document and implement a local action plan.

Caring for our Planet

We can make the world a better place, but it is up to all of us to effect change and make our voices heard.

Change our attitudes. We value nature because of its usefulness to us. If we want a sustainable future we need to change this mindset. We need to recognise that all life has intrinsic value — a reverential, respectful world-view is required. Then we will destroy less, poison less, kill less.

Live simply. A high living standard — measured by wealth and material acquisition — has become the be-all and end-all of modern society. For an eco-friendly life we need to seek quality of life instead. We need to live more simply, so that others may simply live. Anyone can make life complicated; it requires genius to make it simple.

Consume less. Fifty years ago the world's population was 3 billion. Now it has doubled to 6 billion, and humans at their present rate of consumption are exceeding the capacity of the earth — something for which we all have to take personal responsibility. Therefore, live more lightly, taking from nature only what is needed, so as to make a smaller footprint on the earth. "There is enough in the world for everybody's need, but not enough for anybody's greed", said Mahatma Gandhi.

Waste not. Waste is a sin against

nature and a curse of modern life. Every day, millions of tons of waste are thrown into the natural world, which it simply cannot cope with. Millions of plastic bottles and plastic bags are cluttering and clogging the system, polluting rivers and oceans. Therefore, reusing, mending and recycling must be regarded as great virtues. One very simple step is to re-use plastic bags, or take a cloth bag when you go shopping. Use less harmful products when cleaning the house and washing clothes (such as NP detergents).

Walk. Our lives have become dependent on cars — even for a short distance. This lack of exercise makes us obese and unhealthy, with less energy than we might have if we walked.

Meditate and pray. Our lives have become too busy and too stressful. To restore the balance, we need to take some time during the day for personal replenishment, for the development of soul qualities, for reflection and for our proper relationship with the natural world and the Creator to develop and grow on a foundation of spiritual tranquillity.

Work less. For a sustainable future we need to work less, do less, spend less and be more. From simply being

will emerge relationships, celebrations and joy. Sustainable living is joyful living.

Be informed. No one can lay down a blueprint for green living; each of us has to develop our own ideas. But we have to build on all the new thinking in this field. There are books, magazines and courses which can help us. We need to make time to study.*

Act. We need to be awake and alert to the exploitative actions of others. But we cannot work alone; we have to be in solidarity with organisations working for a sustainable future, such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and Christian Aid. Choose an organisation which suits your temperament and work with your local community.

(Adapted from an article by Satish Kumar, *My Green Manifesto*, originally published in *The Tablet*; courtesy of Sheila Quonoey pbvm, Wagga)

*A useful resource is the new *EarthSong Journal* available from 43 Glenelg Drive, Clayton South Vic 3169, phone 03 9551 2673, email earthsong@pacific.net.au. The latest edition carries a tribute to Angela Cameron, Earth Saint.

Concerns about the Vatican and GE Foods

On 24 September 2004, at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, the USA Embassy to the Holy See, in co-operation with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, organised a conference entitled: *Feeding a Hungry World: The Moral Imperative of Biotechnology*. The title of the conference implies that there is a moral requirement for the use of Genetically Engineered foods to alleviate hunger. Nothing is further from the truth. The world produces enough food — the problem is with distribution, land reform and social inequity. The use of GE foods actually threatens food security. How can this happen? GE foods limit crops to a dangerous sameness of genetic make-up. If such a crop succumbs to a new disease, the whole crop is lost and another food shortage results. Researchers have then to return to the more diverse original seeds to find a solution, that is if there are some still in existence. Hence another devastating effect of GE foods is the destruction of biodiversity, an attack on the beauty and diversity of life forms.

There were major concerns raised about this conference by a number of sources including the Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice. We have sent a letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences addressing some of these concerns:

- the actual topic of the conference (outlined above)
- the 'Technology Protection System' inherent in the process of developing genetically engineered crops could jeopardise the livelihood of thousands of poor farmers all over the world
- the disregard for the Christian belief in respect for all living things and their interdependence, as the impact of bio-technology on the whole web of life was omitted from the discussions
- the apparent manipulation of the Church by giant corporations to promote a technology that is insufficiently tested to be either safe, wise or moral, and which holds the strong potential of destroying life rather than preserving it.