

ACSJC Monthly Briefing March 2016 No 165



From the Secretariat March 2015

Dear Friends,

Last month, the report of Australian Human Rights Commission's National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention was released, with AHRC President Gillian Triggs describing the levels of mental health disorders among children in immigration detention as 'deeply shocking'.

The long-awaited report, *The Forgotten Children*, reveals the findings of the expert team who visited 11 detention centres, with repeat visits to Christmas Island, took over a thousand interviews with children and their parents and received over 230 submissions.

Among the findings are the following revelations on the impact of the detention regime:

- 34 per cent of children detained in Australia and Christmas Island have a mental health disorder of such severity that they require psychiatric support. The rate is likely to be higher on Nauru.
- There were 128 incidents of self-harm amongst children over a 15 month period from 2013-2014.
- There were 27 incidents of voluntary starvation involving children over the same period.
- 128 babies were born in detention, many having their first birthday without ever knowing freedom.
- Children have been exposed to unacceptable levels of assault, including sexual assault and violence in detention.
- Children live in very cramped conditions where disease and fear spread quickly.

The report provides first-hand evidence of the impact that prolonged immigration detention has on the mental and physical health of children. It also identifies the impact of detention on the key developmental stages of children as infants, pre-schoolers, primary aged children and teenagers.

Two key recommendations call for all children and their families in immigration detention in Australia and Nauru to be released into the community and for the Migration Act to be amended to provide that children and parents may be detained only for a strictly limited period of time necessary to conduct health, identity and security checks.

The report can be accessed [here](#).

Following the tabling of the report in Parliament, the Prime Minister questioned the credibility of the Australian Human Rights Commission and labelled the report 'a blatantly partisan politicised exercise'. Clearly, the expertise of the inquiry team, backed up by medical experts, including five paediatricians and four child psychiatrists, is unquestionable. And, as Gillian Triggs has said, 'The commission has worked tirelessly over many years reporting on the failure by both Labor and Liberal governments to

comply with their international law obligations to refugees.’ Children in detention and the policies that are causing the harm were the focus of the national inquiry.

Following the release of the report, over 230 Australian human rights organisations and community groups have signed a joint statement calling on all members of the Federal Parliament to take action to end the detention of children once and for all. Coordinated by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), the statement urges the Parliament to introduce legislation to prevent children from being detained for immigration purposes in the future.

The statement was supported by national peak bodies, religious groups, refugee and asylum seeker support agencies, international development agencies, health services, welfare agencies, legal centres and human rights groups, including the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council.

In addition to arguing for legislative change, the statement calls for the release of children and families detained in Nauru and for allegations of child sexual abuse in Australian-funded detention centres to be referred to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

‘The Australian Human Rights Commission report is a well-researched, detailed and deeply disturbing account of the harm inflicted on vulnerable children as a direct result of decisions taken by successive governments,’ RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said.

‘All of the politicians and bureaucrats involved in detaining children knew what they were doing, as the consequences for children’s mental and physical health were clearly outlined in the Commission’s 2004 report on the detention of children and numerous research reports and parliamentary inquiries.

‘Neither of Australia’s major political parties has anything to be proud of. The Rudd and Gillard Governments set new records for the numbers of children detained while the Abbott Government has seen the average length of detention blow out from three months to more than 14 months in its relatively short time in office,’ he said.

The RCOA statement can be found [here](#).

From the early days of his pontificate, Pope Francis has highlighted the need to overcome a ‘globalisation of indifference’ to the most vulnerable and marginalised of the world. He highlighted the problem of this indifference when he visited the Island of Lampedusa in 2013 – when he prayed for asylum seekers who had lost their lives at sea.

And this January, the Holy Father raised the problem of the world’s indifference to asylum seekers at his annual meeting with members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. He recalled how the Christmas stories of the Holy Family highlight the vulnerability of children in a hostile world.

‘From the very start, he is cast aside, left out in the cold, forced to be born in a stable since there was no room at the inn (cf. Lk2:7). If this is how the Son of God was treated, how much more so is the case with so many of our brothers and sisters! Rejection is an attitude we all share; it makes us see our neighbour not as a brother or sister to be accepted, but as unworthy of our attention, a rival, or someone to be bent to our will. This is the mindset which fosters that “throwaway culture” which spares nothing and no one: nature, human beings, even God himself. It gives rise to a humanity filled with pain and constantly torn by tensions and conflicts of every sort.

‘Emblematic of this, in the Gospel infancy narratives, is King Herod. Feeling his authority threatened by the Child Jesus, he orders all the children of Bethlehem to be killed. We think immediately of Pakistan, where a month ago, more than a hundred children were slaughtered with unspeakable brutality.’

The Pope highlighted the flight of thousands from their homelands in search of sanctuary, including those who are particularly vulnerable – children at risk of people trafficking, orphaned children and unaccompanied minors.

He made an [appeal](#) to the diplomats of the world that has some affinity with the findings and recommendations of the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention. Pope Francis said, ‘Here, in your presence, I appeal to the entire international community, as I do to the respective governments involved, to take concrete steps to bring about peace and to protect all those who are victims of war and persecution, driven from their homes and their homelands.’

John Ferguson
National Executive Officer



Current Issues/Resources March 2015

MERCY CAMPAIGN

The [Mercy Campaign](#) is seeking clemency for Myuran Sukamaran and Andrew Chan who were arrested in 2005 in Indonesia for trafficking drugs. Following a lengthy judicial process and unsuccessful appeals against the death sentence, both lodged appeals for clemency with the President. Their appeals have been rejected and their execution is imminent. To support the Mercy Campaign, visit the website where you can sign the petition and see other activities in hope and support for Andrew and Myuran.

PROJECT COMPASSION 2015 – PUT YOUR COMPASSION INTO ACTION

On 15 February, Caritas Australia, the international aid and development organization of the Catholic Church, launched its annual Project Compassion appeal – one of Australia’s largest humanitarian fundraising and awareness-raising campaigns. Each year Project Compassion, which runs through the six weeks of Lent, brings hundreds of thousands of Australians together in solidarity with the world’s poor. Caritas Australia CEO, Paul O’Callaghan, said Project Compassion was an extraordinary, ongoing demonstration of the faith, love and generosity of caring supporters, all in the name of justice and peace. To donate to [Project Compassion](#), or for fundraising ideas or phone 1800 024 413.

2015 CLOSE THE GAP PROGRESS AND PRIORITIES REPORT

The Close the Gap Campaign is urging the Federal Government to focus on greater access to primary health care services to detect, treat and manage chronic health conditions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Campaign Co-Chairs Mick Gooda and Kirstie Parker released the [2015 Close the Gap Progress and Priorities Report](#), to coincide with the Prime Minister’s annual report card to Parliament on progress made to reduce Indigenous disadvantage. Commissioner Gooda and Ms Parker said closing the gap in health equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other

Australians is an agreed national priority. 'All political parties and almost 200,000 Australians have committed to end the health equality gap by 2030,' they said. 'With 15 years to go, we need to build on success. We need to continue the national effort as a priority and we need to expand and strengthen these efforts with bold policy initiatives.' Read the media release [here](#).

NEW PUBLICATION: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE REFERENDUM TO RECOGNISE INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

This book details how our Constitution was drafted, and shows how Aboriginal peoples came to be excluded from the new political settlement. It explains what the 1967 referendum – in which over 90% of Australians voted to delete discriminatory references to Aboriginal people from the Constitution – achieved and why discriminatory racial references remain. With clarity and authority the book shows the symbolic and legal power of such a change and how we might get there. Concise and clear, it is written by two of the best-known experts in the country on matters legal, indigenous and constitutional. Recognise is essential reading on what should be a watershed occasion for our nation. [Authors](#): Megan David and George Williams.

DVD RESOURCE: EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES

The Women's Reconciliation Network ran a forum on constitution recognition at Ashfield Town Hall in Sydney in March 2014. A recording of the forum is now available in the DVD 'Exploring Perspectives: Conversations on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People'. The Women's Reconciliation Network invites you to share this valuable resource in schools, tertiary institutions, community groups and learning circles. The 27-minute DVD includes presentations by: Kirsten Grey, Kamilaroi/Muruwari Woman, CEO NSW Reconciliation Council; George Williams AM, Professor of Constitutional Law UNSW; Nicole Watson, Birri Gubba Woman, Researcher, Jumbunna House of Learning UTS; and Jeff McMullen AM, Journalist and Film Maker. The DVD costs \$10. To purchase copies, contact Sr Helen Kearins at the ACSJC on (02) 8306 3499 or admin@acsjc.org.au

AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION REPORT

The Australian Human Rights Commission welcomes the [tabling](#) in Parliament of *The Forgotten Children, the Report of the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014*. The Commission also welcomes the release of children in immigration detention over recent months. Since the Inquiry began in February 2014, about half of the 1138 children detained at that time are now in the community or in community detention. The Inquiry considered the impact of immigration detention on the health, well-being and development of children. It reviewed changes in law, policy and practice in the treatment of children in immigration detention over the ten years since the Commission's 2004 report, *A Last Resort?* Commission President, Professor Gillian Triggs said, 'It is my sincere hope that the medical evidence and personal stories and findings of this report will ensure that Australians will say 'never again' to policies that cause harm to the health and development of children'.

CHANGE THE LAW TO STOP POLITICIANS LOCKING UP CHILDREN: 200 ORGANISATIONS SPEAK OUT

Over 230 organisations and community groups across Australia signed a joint [statement](#) calling for action to end the detention of children, once and for all. The statement urged the Australian Parliament introduce legislation to prevent children from being held in closed immigration detention in the future

and to take action to end the offshore processing of asylum claims. The Write To Be Heard campaign is asking you to join in calling for legislative change to protect children from prolonged indefinite detention and demanding the release of all children from immigration detention facilities in Australia and Nauru. Read about the campaign [here](#) and follow the links to contact MPs and [Senators](#).

CAMPAIGN: 'WE'RE BETTER THAN THIS'

We're Better Than This is a movement that has grown from a decision by ordinary Australians to do something about the extraordinary cruelty of our Government towards the hundreds of innocent children in detention/deterrence camps. It has the support of prominent Australians. The founders are a small group of professionals with experience in human rights, refugee advocacy, PR, film making, advertising, marketing and social media. Send a postcard or upload your own video. To find out more, visit the campaign [website](#).

ST COLUMBAN'S MISSION SOCIETY RESOURCE FOR LENT: THE GRACE OF FORESTS

The Grace of Forests Year B consists of six weekly Lenten reflections about Australian forests to accompany the Gospels for Year B. Each week looks at a different kind of forest – Acacia, Eucalypt, Casuarina, Melaleuca, Mangrove and Rainforests. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the Stations of the Forests DVD and booklet. It is ideally suited for senior students and adults. Download 'The Grace of Forests' Lenten Resource [here](#).

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (IWDA) PETITION: END THE RIGHT TO RAPE

Did you know 2.6 billion women live in countries where it's legal for men to rape them? That's outrageous. Please sign the petition now and share it with your friends, family and colleagues to tell the world that NO man has the right [to rape](#). The goal is to reach 15,000 signatures in the lead up to International Women's Day (8th March) to pressure world leaders and show them that Australians believe ALL women have the right to protection and safety. Sign the petition [here](#).

MERCY SOWING SEEDS

The Seeds of Justice program offers students and teachers the opportunity to deepen their awareness of social justice and meet like-minded people from other schools. Over the last decade, Seeds of Justice, an initiative of Mercy Education, has coordinated two student camps and one staff conference each year for metropolitan schools in Victoria. In 2013 the scope of the project began to grow, stretching to encompass schools from regional Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia. Guest speakers are a feature of the camps, sharing their expert, firsthand experiences working within the field of social justice and then opening up the floor to the students to respond. Like to know more? Visit the [website](#).

EASTER CAMPAIGN: HELP ELIMINATE CHILD SLAVERY IN THE COCOA INDUSTRY

Easter is a time of year when a huge amount of chocolate is sold and eaten all around the world. The shocking truth is that children as young as 10 are trafficked and exploited to create chocolate. This year [join](#) ACRATH and STOP THE TRAFFIK campaign for #TRAFFIKFREE chocolate.



ACSJC Publications March 2015

COMING SOON: SERIES PAPER 76 – ‘I WAS IN PRISON’

I Was in Prison: A window into prison ministry, by Dr Ruth Webber, explores the work of prison chaplains serving prisoners, ex-prisoners and the families of all who are or have been imprisoned. Dr Webber investigates the various ways in which chaplaincy is able to bring comfort to prisoners, meet their spiritual needs and provide practical help. The paper is based on interviews with prison chaplains, prisoners, ex-prisoners and families of prisoners. The paper draws on the [2011–12 Social Justice Statement *Building Bridges, Not Walls*](#) and revisits some of the issues raised in that Statement. The publication will be available in early March.

ORDER NOW! – 2015 SOCIAL JUSTICE DIARY

The 2015 Social Justice Diary includes the dates of significant events, anniversaries and special days which celebrate particular aspects of social justice. The Diary provides a social justice program for the full year. Information and ideas for prayer and reflection are included. This is an essential resource for teachers and parishes. Cost: \$7.50 (including postage). To download an order form, [click here](#).

DISCUSSION GUIDE: 2015 WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE

The theme for the 48th World Day of Peace Message from Pope Francis is *No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters*. The Pope Francis speaks of the Ongoing scourge of human trafficking and the need to act to protect and defend its victims – labourers including children who are exploited by industry, migrants who are exploited during a dangerous journey, women and minors forced into prostitution or sold for arranged marriages, those trafficked for the sale of organs, for recruitment as soldiers, for illegal activities, for cross-border adoption. He says the effort to address trafficking is an ‘immense task, which calls for courage, patience and perseverance, deserves the appreciation of the whole Church and society’. The ACSJC has prepared a Discussion Guide for the papal message, which is available on our [website](#).

SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT 2014–2015 – STILL TAKING ORDERS

This year’s Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Statement is entitled ‘A Crown for Australia: Striving for the best in our sporting nation’. The ACSJC is still taking orders for the Statement. An order form is available [here](#).

Prayer Card & Leaflet: Ten Steps Towards Being a Good Sport.

Now available. Call (02) 8306 3499

BUILDING BRIDGES

The book, *Building Bridges: Social Justice Statements from Australia’s Bishops 1988 to 2013*, brings the Statements together in an attractive and readable format. The publication is fully indexed, making this an exceptional resource for education and research. It offers an invaluable insight into Catholic social teaching brought to life in an Australian context over the past 26 years. This collection is a vital resource

for anyone interested in the Church's teaching on justice. It is of special interest to schools and universities and to parish and diocesan groups.

Building Bridges is available from the ACSJC for \$35.00 per copy including postage anywhere in Australia. Order forms are available [here](#).

(Catholic Social Justice Series papers: \$7.50 a copy, including postage)



News Monitor March 2015

[Pope to Merkel: "Politicians, defend the poor"](#)

Pope Francis and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed the Ukrainian conflict, international poverty, and other stresses in Europe during a meeting at the Vatican.

[Bali Nine: Priest says waiting for execution is torture](#)

An Indonesian-based priest was trying to get support from the German Bishops Conference for a challenge to the death penalty in the Indonesian Constitutional Court on the grounds that waiting to be executed is also torture.

[Volunteer barbers deeply moved by encounters with homeless](#)

As homeless men and women lined up under St Peter's colonnade to use the Vatican's newly christened showers and barbershop, volunteers who were assisting them said they were moved by their encounters.

[Catholic Church speaks out against PNG death penalty](#)

The Catholic Church of Papua New Guinea spoke out against the resumption of the death penalty, with government plans to execute 13 death row inmates by the end of the year.

[Aust Church groups condemn govt over child detention](#)

Catholic social justice groups condemned the Australian government over the report released by the Australian Human Rights Commission into the mandatory detention of refugee children.

[Caritas chief: Find the courage to criticise our economic system](#)

The economy is a human creation, not a god, so humans the responsibility to manage the economy in a way that benefits the most people, Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga said.

[Kidnap, trafficking, slavery, forced conversion a daily reality](#)

The enslavement and trafficking of people is against God's plan for human freedom and against human dignity. It is a theft of that freedom and defilement of that dignity, said the Archbishop of Sydney, Anthony Fisher, at St Mary's Cathedral.

[Church wants rental scheme for affordable housing continued](#)

The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle called on the federal and state governments to continue the "national rental affordability scheme".

[Vatican unveils free showers and haircuts for the homeless](#)

Construction work on a public washing area at St Peter's Square finished, and the Vatican unveiled the facilities for the first time.

[Catholic and Muslim leaders call for mercy for drug traffickers](#)

Appearing together on the grounds of St Mary's Cathedral, Catholic and Muslim leaders pleaded for mercy for Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, saying they were reformed men who deserved another chance.

[Romero's beatification will be soon, says postulator](#)

Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero will be beatified in San Salvador "certainly within the year and possibly within a few months," said Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, postulator of his sainthood cause.

[Vatican launches first Day of Prayer against human trafficking](#)

In an initiative that builds on one of Pope Francis' top social and political priorities, the Vatican presented plans for a first-ever *International Day of Prayer and Reflection against Human Trafficking*, held during the month.

[Vatican urges UN to stop ignoring attacks on Christian women](#)

The Holy See's delegation to the United Nations warned that Christians face "extinction" in some regions of armed conflict, with Christian women and girls particularly vulnerable.

[Francis declares Oscar Romero a martyr](#)

Pope Francis signed a decree declaring Archbishop Oscar Romero died a martyr.

[Vatican report calls for greater roles for women](#)

A new Vatican report warned that the Church's image of women does not correspond to reality, and called for them to be given decision-making roles.

[Archbishop Hart seeks clemency for Australians on death row](#)

The Archbishop of Melbourne and President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Denis Hart, wrote to the Indonesian President and Ambassador seeking clemency for two Australians facing the death penalty.

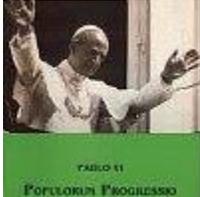
[Time for governments to show some heart over detainees](#)

It is high time Australia and Indonesia sat down at the table to negotiate the terms for safe and orderly return of unvisaed asylum seekers heading to Australia by boat, said Fr Frank Brennan SJ.

[Cosmetic surgery can be an 'aggression' against women](#)

Cosmetic surgery “can be aggressive toward the feminine identity,” according to a Vatican discussion document.

– courtesy cathnews.com



Social Justice Diary March 2015

March 2015

1	Sun	Second Sunday of Lent <i>Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Day</i> 1999: International Treaty to Ban Landmines entered into force - ACSJC Resources on Peacebuilding Clean Up Australia Day - ACSJC resources on the Environment
2	Mon	
3	Tue	
4	Wed	1979: Pope John Paul II's encyclical Redemptor Hominis
5	Thu	1970: International Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons - ACSJC Resources on Peacebuilding
6	Fri	World Day of Prayer - ACSJC Prayers Theme: <i>Do you know what I have done to you?</i> (Jn 13:1–17) READ MORE ↓
7	Sat	
8	Sun	Third Sunday of Lent <i>International Women's Day</i>
9	Mon	
10	Tue	

11	Wed	<u>2011: Earthquake and tsunami strike Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, killing 18,500 people and causing widespread contamination.</u>
12	Thu	<u>1913: Founding of Canberra as Australia's Capital</u>
13	Fri	
14	Sat	
15	Sun	Fourth Sunday of Lent <i>World Consumer Rights Day</i> READ MORE ↓
16	Mon	
17	Tue	St Patrick
18	Wed	
19	Thu	St Joseph, husband of Mary <u>National Close the Gap Day</u> - ACSJC Resources on <u>Justice for Indigenous People</u> <u>1866: Beginning of Sisters of St Joseph at Penola, South Australia.</u> <u>2003: USA and allies invade Iraq</u> - ACSJC Resources on <u>Peacebuilding</u>
20	Fri	
21	Sat	<u>International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination</u> - ACSJC resources on <u>Confronting Racism</u> <u>International Day of Forests and the Tree</u> - ACSJC resources on the <u>Environment</u> <u>World Down Syndrome Day</u> <u>World Poetry Day</u> <u>Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination</u> - ACSJC resources on <u>Confronting Racism</u> <u>Harmony Day (Australia)</u> From the Australian government's Harmony Day website: READ MORE ↓

22	Sun	Fifth Sunday of Lent <i>World Water Day - ACSJC resources on the Environment</i>
23	Mon	<i>World Meteorological Day</i>
24	Tue	<i>International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims</i> <i>World Tuberculosis Day (WHO)</i> <i>1980: Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero</i>
25	Wed	The Annunciation <i>International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade - ACSJC Resources on Trade Justice</i> <i>1877: Death of Caroline Chisholm</i>
26	Thu	1967: Pope Paul VI's encyclical <i>Populorum Progressio</i> ('On the Progress of Peoples') <i>1975: Biological Weapons Convention enters into force - ACSJC Resources on Peacebuilding</i>
27	Fri	
28	Sat	
29	Sun	Palm Sunday <i>Neighbour Day (Australia)</i>
30	Mon	
31	Tue	