



ACSJC BRIEFING

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From the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, the social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia - www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Friends,

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council and its Secretariat would like to wish all our readers a Happy New Year. Of course, the optimism we usually hold for the year ahead has been somewhat clouded by the looming threat of a war in Iraq.

On Thursday 9 January, Acting Prime Minister John Anderson confirmed that Special Air Service personnel had been placed on standby for possible deployment overseas. The following day, Prime Minister Howard stated that Australian troops could be sent to the Persian Gulf within weeks. In the short space of two weeks, Australians were witnessing a large contingent of forces being sent to the Gulf, with the first departures taking place on 23 January 2003.

GOVERNMENT SAYS "PRE-DEPLOYMENT"

When Australia's commitment of forces to the Middle East was announced, the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence emphasised that no decision had yet

been taken by the Government to commit to a war against Iraq. It was said the departing troops were being "pre-deployed" for the purposes of acclimatisation to conditions in the Gulf and to add to the political pressure being placed on Iraq with the build up of US and British forces.

The speed with which the Government has placed our servicemen and women on standby and then deployed them reveals how preparations for war have been allowed to run far in advance of informed public debate. The ACSJC and many Church and community groups fear that the pace at which Australia is entering the process of a military build-up in the Gulf will promote a state of mind among many Australians that war is inevitable.

NO PUBLIC CONSULTATION

We are witnessing Australia's participation in US military preparations at a time when no world leader or authority has yet made a case that would justify war. Australians were promised a full Parliamentary debate on a possible military commitment to a war on Iraq. The deployment of forces has occurred with no consultation with the Australian people and without debate before Parliament on the issue.

The deployment has occurred when opinion polls would suggest such an action is at odds with Australian community sentiment. Recent opinion polls conducted in the US, Britain, Germany, France, Denmark, Turkey and Canada also reveal a general opposition to war against Iraq with even stronger opposition to a US-led intervention without United Nations approval.

UNITED NATIONS PROCESSES NOT YET COMPLETE

Australia has deployed troops when the diplomatic processes of the U.N. have yet to run their full course, and have by no means been exhausted - there are good grounds for the U.N. granting additional time to weapons inspectors to ensure a credible inspection process. The U.N. remains the appropriate political authority not only to carry out weapons inspections on behalf of the international community, but also to make determinations in relation to any breach of Resolution 1441, and to decide whether or not military force should be exercised in the event of such a breach and/or the discovery of weapons of mass destruction.

Active preparations for war risk undermining the very U.N. processes for resolving tensions without recourse to warfare. The ACSJC has expressed concern over the commitment of Australian forces to the Gulf while the deliberations of the U.N. are far from complete and called on the Commonwealth Government to redouble its efforts to secure a diplomatic solution.

CHURCH LEADERS AROUND THE WORLD SPEAK OUT

In November 2002, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference issued a peace statement - Build peace, avoid war - urging great restraint at this most delicate time and welcoming the role of the U.N. Security Council in relation to the Iraq crisis. The bishops called on those who exercise political authority and diplomatic influence to do all in their power to build peace and avoid war (http://www.catholic.org.au/statements/j_u_peace.htm).

The Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes has also spoken out strongly on this issue (<http://www.aclri.catholic.org.au/media/0301iraq.html>).

These calls are in keeping with the strenuous efforts of the Holy See, and the many similar statements made by the Church leaders around the world including those in:

Britain

(<http://217.19.224.165/CN/02/021115.htm>),

Canada

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Archbishop Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, recently questioned the validity of the notion of a "pre-emptive" or "preventative" war and argued that it does not belong to the definition of a just war

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Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has also made clear the Church's opposition to a unilateral pre-emptive strike against Iraq

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In his World Day of Peace message, Pope John Paul II said that "perhaps nowhere today is there a more obvious need for the correct use of political authority than in the dramatic situation of the Middle East and the Holy Land"

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More recently, in his address to the Vatican Diplomatic Corps, the Holy Father argued forcefully against military action in Iraq and called for adherence to existing international agreements

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THE COSTS OF WAR

Bishop William Morris, ACSJC Chairman, has reiterated the concerns of the Australian Catholic Bishops for the fate of the people of Iraq in the event of an outbreak of war. The long years of the Iran-Iraq War, followed by the (first) Gulf War, the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and the UN economic sanctions, have already inflicted grave damage upon this people. Any further conflict would be a human catastrophe. The Iraqi people are the innocent victims of this unfolding crisis.

Bishop Morris also expressed the concern of all Australians for the safety of Australian servicemen and women who have been sent to the Gulf and prayed for their safe return to families and loved ones.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Pray for Peace. Visit the Vatican website's "Prayer for Peace" page which includes homilies, addresses and prayers of Pope John Paul II (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/peace/prayer-peace_index.html).

Voice your opinion and concerns on talk-back radio or put pen to paper through a letter to the editor of your favourite newspaper.

Email or write a letter to your political representatives including the Prime Minister, Minister for Defence and/or Minister for Foreign Affairs. Contact details of Federal Parliamentarians can be found at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/los.pdf> and <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/memlist.pdf>.

Join a peaceful demonstration. Many peace marches will be held around Australia during February. Visit <http://www.vicpeace.org/diary.html> for a range of information on national events for the coming month. And wear a purple ribbon as a symbol of peace. The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council and its Secretariat would like to wish all our readers a Happy New Year. Of course, the optimism we usually hold for the year ahead has been somewhat clouded by the looming threat of a war in Iraq.

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Voice your opinion and concerns on talk-back radio or put pen to paper through a letter to the editor of your favourite newspaper.

Email or write a letter to your political representatives including the Prime Minister, Minister for Defence and/or Minister for Foreign Affairs. Contact details of Federal Parliamentarians can be found at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/los.pdf> and <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/memlist.pdf>.

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- John Ferguson (National Executive Officer)

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(details at <http://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/briefing>; orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or email: admin@acsjc.org.au)

OCCASIONAL PAPER: CHRISTIAN SOCIAL CONSCIENCE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Father Neil Brown, the President of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, is the author of Christian Social Conscience and Social Justice, No. 45 in the series of Occasional Papers in the Catholic Social Justice Series (cost \$5.50 inc GST plus postage).

SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2003

The Social Justice Calendar for 2003 focuses on the themes of eradicating racism and cultivating multiculturalism. These themes coincide with next year's theme for the Social Justice Sunday Statement. During 2003, the ACSJC will publish a 'Ten Steps' brochure and prayer card that pick up these important themes (cost \$6.60 inc GST plus postage).

'SUSTAINING CREATION' ACTION KIT

The ecumenical environment action kit 'Sustaining Creation' has been produced to help communities, schools and small groups become actively involved in working for environmental justice. A range of materials is included to support activities including prayer, worship, reflection and action (cost \$5.50 inc GST plus postage).

CURRENT ISSUES

MEDIA RELEASE - CATHOLIC JUSTICE COUNCIL QUESTIONS "PRE-DEPLOYMENT" - 24 January 2003

The ACSJC has questioned the so-called pre-deployment of Australian forces to the Middle East - stating that the decision to join the US military build-up seems to contradict strong community sentiment and runs the risk of undermining United Nations processes. Concerns are raised that military preparations are moving too far ahead of any reasoned public debate on the possibility of war and the important role of the United Nations as the appropriate political authority in seeking a peaceful resolution to the Iraq crisis is emphasised.

(http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/media_releases/2003_12_24_1043710485.html)

MEDIA RELEASE - ASIO BILL DEBATED ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY - 10 December 2002

On International Human Rights Day, the ASIO Bill came before the Federal Senate. The ACSJC called on all political parties to consider opposing the Bill if proposals ensuring the preservation of basic human rights fail. It was noted that the powers outlined for Federal authorities would threaten certain liberties - even after considering recommendations of significant amendments of a Senate Committee Report to water down the Government's bill.

(http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/media_releases/2002_12_10_1039736144.html)

This legislation was defeated when the Government refused to accept the Opposition's proposed changes to the bill during a marathon sitting of over 30 hours on the last day of Parliament in December 2002. The Government appears determined to pass its legislation without any substantial amendments. Debate on the bill will resume when Parliament sits again in early February 2003. Despite the proposed changes pursued by the Opposition, the bill would have given the

ASIO unacceptable powers to detain and hold people for questioning where no crime had been committed. ASIO would have been able to detain individuals because it was believed they held information on a possible terrorist threat.

The delay in this bill allows a brief extension of time to urge our political leaders to prevent this legislation. You could raise your concerns by writing to Prime Minister John Howard and Simon Crean, Leader of the Opposition c/o Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia.

MEDIA RELEASE - CHANGES TO IMMIGRATION DETENTION - AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP - 5 December 2002

The ACSJC and the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office welcomed indications from both of the major political parties to improve the circumstances of asylum seekers in detention. The announcement of Labor's new policy on refugees and asylum seekers and changes announced by Minister Ruddock to the Government's detention policy represent an important first step to moving beyond the current approach to processing arrivals to Australia.

It was noted that the Labor policy has variations of proposals contained in the document produced by Church organisations: The Humanitarian Program for People Seeking Protection in Australia. Minister Ruddock's commitment to supervised hostel care was welcomed as being positive for women and children, but concerns were raised about preserving family unity.

(http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/media_releases/2002_12_10_1043303189.html)

In recent times there have been numerous national and international reports on Australia's treatment of asylum seekers which have pointed to the substandard conditions of our immigration detention centres. Key issues of concern have included lack of health and other services, prolonged detention, incidents of self-harm, the detention of children, prison-like conditions etc. The riots and arson attacks over Christmas highlight the

need for the Government to act quickly to improve Australia's current approach the processing of those seeking asylum.

FEBRUARY NOTICES

IN THE EVENT OF WAR: Various networks such as the "Victorian Peace Network" and the "Walk Against the War Coalition" are preparing for Public Rallies in Sydney, Adelaide, Canberra, Newcastle, Darwin, Brisbane, Perth and Hobart at 5.00pm on the day war commences (or the next day if news comes late in the day). (further info: <http://www.vicpeace.org/diary.html>)

Each Friday: PEACE VIGIL held at Sydney Town Hall between 5.30 - 8.30pm, Walk Against the War Coalition. Contact: Bruce 9386-1240; Nick 0409 762 081; Hannah 0418 668 089; John 9567 7533.

January 31-February 10: PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION "Children of the Gulf War", 12.00-6.00pm, Horti Hall Gallery, 31 Victoria Street Melbourne. (further info: <http://www.vicpeace.org/iraq/actions/exhibition.html>)

February 3: PUBLIC LECTURE "Victims' Justice? Will the International Criminal Court deliver Justice to Victims?", Part 5 of the Australian Red Cross International Law Lecture Series, 6.00pm, Red Cross House, 159 Clarence Street Sydney. (further info: <http://www.nsw.redcross.org.au/news/event.asp>)

February 8: BALLARAT PEACE RALLY - Meeting at cnr Drummond and Sturt at 11.00am and marching to Town Hall.

February 11: PUBLIC LECTURE on "The History and Development of International Indigenous rights" by Professor Erica-Irene Daes - former Chair and Special Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Details: 7.30pm, Tuesday 11 Feb 2003, Museum of Sydney, Corner of Philip and Bridge Streets, Sydney.

Doors open 6.30pm. To ensure a seat at the lecture, contact Ms Janis Constable Ph: 02 928 9852 or Email: janisconstable@humanrights.gov.au

February 11: MANAGING SECURITY SEMINAR, "Defending Australia", National Press Club. Speakers include: The Hon. Alexander Downer and General Peter Gosgrove (further info: http://www.npc.org.au/club/pdf/C3i_Feb_2003.pdf)

February 15-16: INTERNATIONAL WEEKEND OF ACTION AGAINST WAR (further info of events around the nation: <http://www.vicpeace.org/diary.html>; <http://www.labor.net.au/campaigns/nowar/nowar.html>)

February 18-20: CONFERENCE "THE CHALLENGES OF IMMIGRATION and Integration in the European Union and Australia" at the University of Sydney (further info: <http://www.anu.edu.au/NEC/immigration.html>)

February 21: CONFERENCE "CONSTITUTIONAL LAW: Centenary of the High Court of Australia" at NSW Parliament House Theatre, Macquarie Street, Sydney. (further info: <http://www.law.unimelb.edu.au/aac/events.html>)

JANUARY NEWS MONITOR

PAX CHRISTI CONTINUES TO URGE DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION TO IRAQ CRISIS: As the Iraqi weapons inspectors' report was submitted to meet the UN-mandated deadline, the international Catholic peace movement Pax Christi reiterated its strong support for a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the crisis.

CATHOLIC JUSTICE COUNCIL QUESTIONS IRAQ 'PRE-DEPLOYMENT': The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council questioned the so-called pre-deployment' of Australian forces to the Middle East.

MELBOURNE COMMISSION CALLS IRAQ WAR 'MORALLY QUESTIONABLE': Deployment of Australian troops to Iraq for a possible war is morally questionable, Melbourne's Archdiocesan Commission for Justice, Development and Peace said.

AUSTRALIAN BISHOPS BACK POPE'S 'NO TO WAR' CAMPAIGN: Australian Catholic bishops spoke out in support of a call by Pope John Paul II last week for world leaders to say 'No to War'.

NEW DEVELOPMENT IN JUST WAR TEACHING: Archbishop Renato Martino, the recently appointed president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, advanced the view that Church teaching on the justice of warfare are evolving, much like the Church's stance on the death penalty.

CHURCHES INCREASE OPPOSITION TO MUGABE'S 'FOOD POLICY': Outspoken comments of Zimbabwe's Bulawayo Archbishop Pius Ncube late last year were followed up by further criticisms from a range of Church leaders.

ZIMBABWEAN CHRISTIANS SPEAK OUT AGAINST CRICKET TOUR: Churches from the country's main Christian denominations issued a statement expressing their dismay at the British cricket team's decision to play in Zimbabwe.

CATHOLIC WELFARE PLEASED WITH POLITICIANS' SUPPORT FOR FAMILY HEALTH: Catholic Welfare Australia welcomed moves by the Liberal and Labor parties to highlight the important issue of children's health and well-being.

PELL STRESSES FREEDOM OF WORSHIP FOR AUSTRALIAN MOSLEMS: Members of Australia's

Islamic community should continue to worship as they choose, according to Sydney's Archbishop George Pell, who said "the extremism of fanatics overseas, or even a few hot-heads here, should not be foisted on them as typical of a whole community."

VINNIES CHALLENGES AUSTRALIANS' POVERTY 'DENIAL': Australians either don't believe poverty is a problem or can't conceive there are solutions, according to St Vincent de Paul Society National Council President John Moore.

JESUIT STUDY FINDS POOR EXCLUDED FROM JOB MARKET: Communities of disadvantaged families are effectively excluded from the competitive job market, according to a Jesuit Social Services study based on interviews with residents of a Melbourne public housing estate.

ADELAIDE CATHOLICS ENCOURAGED TO OBSERVE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FRESH WATER: Executive officer of Adelaide's Justice and Peace Commission Chris Keating urged local Catholics to focus on this year's UNESCO International Year for Fresh Water.

CARROLL SUPPORTS VATICAN CALL FOR POLITICIANS TO ACT MORALLY: Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference President, Archbishop Francis Carroll backed a Vatican call for Catholic politicians and lay people to be guided by their moral convictions when making political decisions.

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/301>

DECEMBER SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 1 THE GREENSBORO

SIT-IN: When the "Greensboro Four" sat at the Whites Only Food counter in North Carolina, USA in 1960 they were interested in much more than simply ordering something to eat. Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair Jr. and David Richmond were challenging the institutionalised racism of the time. Segregation was law. Schools were segregated. African Americans were not allowed to enter white owned restaurants, had to use separate drinking fountains and were required to ride in the back of buses. When the Greensboro Four were asked to leave they remained seated, asking for justice. Their action prompted similar protests across the USA and led to integration of the Woolworth and Kress chains that were landmarks on every street in the South.

FEBRUARY 6 WAITANGI DAY: The Treaty of Waitangi is seen as the founding document of the nation of New Zealand. Representatives of the British Crown and Maori chiefs signed it in 1840.

There has never been a formal agreement between Indigenous Australians and the Government of Australia. In 1770, Captain Cook ignored orders that he carried from the British Admiralty to obtain the "consent of the natives" before acting to take possession of land. Many Indigenous Australians are calling for some form of Agreement with the Federal Government to have their rights as "first peoples" recognised. Treaties and legislated Agreements exist in New Zealand, Canada, Greenland, Finland, Norway, Sweden and countries of Latin America.

FEBRUARY 11 WORLD DAY OF THE SICK:

Celebration of the World Day of the Sick occurs on this day which commemorates the apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes. On this day we express our solidarity with all who are suffering pain and infirmity.

FEBRUARY 13 FREEDOM RIDES

AGAINST RACISM: Charles Perkins led students on a bus tour of NSW to protest against racism and discrimination against Aboriginal people.

Nearly 30 years later, Indigenous Australians continue to be the most disadvantaged group of people within Australian society in terms of access to health, education, housing and employment.

FEBRUARY 21 INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY:

UNESCO has estimated that half of the world's 6000 to 7000 languages are facing the risk of dying out. The celebration of International Mother Language Day is part of the drive to protect the intangible heritage of humanity and preserve cultural diversity. UNESCO recognises the role of the mother tongue in the development of communication skills, concept formation and creativity, and the fact that mother tongues are the prime vehicles of cultural identity. Celebrating International Mother Language Day is meant to promote personal development and the cultural diversity of humanity.

FEBRUARY 21 BANGLADESH MARTYRS DAY:

On February 21 1952, police opened fire on a mass rally of people who had gathered to advocate that their mother language, Bangla, become one of the State languages of what was then Pakistan. The people of Bangladesh have observed Martyrs Day since 1953. Bangladesh sent an official proposal to UNESCO requesting the world body adopt a resolution to declare February 21 International Mother Language Day. It was adopted in 1999.

We hope that the spirit of International Mother Language Day will help develop in us a deep respect for not only our mother tongue, but for those of others as well, help the expression of all kinds of majority and minority languages and put an end to the dictates of one language over the other.

Govt. of Bangladesh.

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contributions are also welcome.**