



ACSJC BRIEFING

No. 41- November 2003

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

IN THIS ISSUE

- From the Secretariat
- Latest publications
- Current issues
- November Notices
- October News Monitor
- November Social Justice Calendar

FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Friends,

Anti-poverty Week was held in mid-October. Its aim was to strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and to encourage research and action to address this problem. The week concluded with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on Friday 17th October.

The broad range of activities undertaken during this week reveals most clearly the importance of the issue in the lives of individuals and local communities throughout Australia (<http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au>).

POVERTY NOT NEWSWORTHY?

Despite the multitude of church groups, charities, welfare services, politicians, academics, local governments and councils involved in raising the issues and proposing solutions, the issue of poverty failed to rate the mention it deserved in the mainstream media.

Earlier in the month, a joint-letter from the Heads of Churches and representatives of the Jewish and Islamic faiths was subject to the same fate in the secular press (<http://www.catholic.org.au/media/2003/pdfs/051003.pdf>). The issuing of a petition with such broad representation of religious leaders is significant in its

own right. To be calling on the Prime Minister and Premiers to act decisively and together to address poverty also had relevance.

Perhaps the issue of poverty is not seen as being newsworthy - regarded as old hat or too complex to address in a short space. Poverty is a multifaceted issue that sees discussion focusing on issues as diverse as what measurements should be used, absolute or relative poverty, the impact of unemployment, effective marginal tax rates, the adequacy of the social security benefits, health and welfare issues, and the distribution of wealth etc.

Additionally, there may be a perception in the community that the bulk of Australians have benefited from the decade of economic growth and, therefore, to be in poverty must be a reflection on the failures and deficiencies of the individuals and families concerned - not the operation of the economy.

Anti-poverty week also faced stiff competition for attention in the media as the nation prepared for visits from two world leaders to Australia.

CERTAINLY RELEVANT!

However, the diversity of people expressing a concern about poverty during this week, the number of organisations and communities who continue to assist those in need, and the significant number of Australians in poverty despite the economic 'good times' confirms that this issue is of great relevance to many Australians.

Some basic statistics reveal the persistence of poverty despite a decade of outstanding economic performance. Over 80,000 low-income Australians pay over half their income in rent. 680,000 children live in jobless households.

134,000 Australians are long-term unemployed. 33 of the 37 poorest electorates in Australia are in rural areas. Indigenous Australians, sole-parent families and people with disabilities remain vulnerable to poverty.

Charities like the Society of St Vincent de Paul and Centacare address poverty every day. With direct knowledge of the consequences of poverty they have worked to keep this issue on the national agenda. In May 2001, St Vincent de Paul issued a major report "Two Australias: Addressing Inequality and Poverty" (<http://www.vinnies.org.au/index.cfm?state=national§ion=socialj&id=2>). This Report addressed the growing inequality between rich and poor and called for a national summit to establish strategies to reduce poverty and measurements against which the Government of the day could be held accountable.

INITIATIVES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN 2003

In February, the ACSJC issued the occasional paper "A Fair Society?" providing reflections on the many aspects of poverty in Australia in light of the 10th Anniversary of the Catholic Bishops' landmark justice statement - "Common Wealth for the Common Good". Contributors to the paper included Veronica Brady, Michael Costigan, Julian Disney, Bruce Duncan, Robert Fitzgerald, Thomas Keneally, Lowitja O'Donoghue, John Phillips and John Warhurst. (http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_papers.html).

It was fortuitous that this Anniversary and the issuing of the ACSJC paper coincided with a Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship. The ACSJC and Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development, Ecology and Peace lodged the paper with the Inquiry. Church agencies were among many making submissions. The Inquiry is due to report its findings on 27 November (http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/poverty/submissions/sublist.htm)

In September, the National Council of Churches of Australia issued a statement decrying the hardship experienced by 2.4 million Australians and calling on the Federal Government to bring all political parties and all levels of government together to produce a national strategy for poverty elimination

(http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/social_justice_network/documents_and_statements/poverty). And in early October the Prime Minister, State Premiers and Territorial Chief Ministers received the joint letter of Christian, Jewish and Islamic leaders calling for a national forum of political and community leaders to commit to such a strategy. Many have supported this call.

Helpful resources have been released over the past month. Among them are poverty facts sheets produced by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (http://www.bsl.org.au/research_and_library/information.html), research undertaken by the Australian Council of Social Service on a 'community poverty line'

(http://coss.net.au/news/acoss/1062981808_19561_acoss.jsp) and a presentation by Jesuit Social Services (<http://cathnews.com/news/310/jsspovwk.ppt>).

NEED FOR CONCERTED ACTION

The complexities of poverty in Australia and the fact that poverty and the wealth divide have persisted through the economic boom demand a coordinated and strategic national strategy.

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle has supported the idea of a national strategy on poverty as has Senator Meg Lees. The Federal Opposition Leader, Simon Crean, said a Labor Government would be committed to a summit setting long-term objectives for employment, health, education and community services. Significantly, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson voiced the National Party's preference for increased investment from a large Budget surplus to be devoted to regional infrastructure and community services rather than tax cuts. While these are all positive developments, the fight against poverty requires a coordinated approach.

The Heads of Churches have stated:
"Successful development of any such strategy clearly involves support and participation of many sectors of the community - including government, capital, labour, welfare services, academia and the media. But the prime responsibility rests with government - Federal, State and Local - for it is the only vehicle with the resources and power to manage the changes required. Gaining the support and driving participation of all sectors throughout the nation requires a solid leadership mechanism, and it is our belief that the Council of Australian Governments may offer a platform for this to happen."

- John Ferguson (National Executive Officer)

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or email: admin@acsjc.org.au)

BACKGROUND PAPER - AUSTRALIA & UNITED STATES FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Available on the ACSJC website -
http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/publications/positionpapers/2003_9_5australia_&_united_states_free_trade_agreement.html

2003 SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY STATEMENT & RESOURCES

Australian Catholic Bishops' Statement: A Generous Heart in the Love of Christ - Challenging Racism in Australia Today. Free electronic version of the 2003 Statement available from the websites of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (<http://www.catholic.org.au>) and ACSJC (<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/CONTENT/publications/documentation/2003sjss.html>).

ECUMENICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY KIT: SUBVERTING RACISM

Ecumenical Kit produced by the Anglican Social Responsibilities Network, Uniting Justice Australia &

ACSJC. Excellent resource for social justice groups and schools. Now available (cost: \$5.50 {plus postage: 1 copy \$1.45; 2-3 copies \$2.45})

LEAFLET & PRAYER CARD: Ten Steps Towards Challenging Racism in Australia Today Now available. Call (02) 9956 5811

OCCASIONAL PAPER: THE LORD HEARS THE CRY OF THE POOR - THE MAGNIFICAT REVISITED.

Catholic Social Justice Series no.48 - Sr Marie Farrell rsm (cost \$5.50 plus postage)

(Postage rates for Catholic Social Justice Series Papers: 1 copy \$1; 2-3 copies \$1.45; 4-5 copies \$2.45)

CURRENT ISSUES

See

<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/mediareleases.html>

MEDIA RELEASE - POVERTY ERADICATION MUST BE A SHARED PRIORITY - 17 October 2003

On International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the ACSJC called for the Federal Government to convene a national forum on poverty. Bishop Christopher Saunders, ACSJC Chairman said, "There have been many inquiries such as the current Senate Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship which is due to report in November. More can be done to address the causes and consequences of poverty in a co-ordinated way by including all levels of government and sectors of our society." The Bishop called for the development of a strategy to reduce poverty and eliminate child poverty. http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/media_releases/2003_10_17_1066388479.html

NOVEMBER NOTICES

NOVEMBER 5: ADDRESS BY FR FRANK BRENNAN SJ, and Canberra launch of his book "Tampering with Asylum". National Press Club 12.00 - 2.00pm, Canberra (refer: <http://www.npc.org.au/speakers.htm>)

NOVEMBER 6: ADDRESS, "SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AFRICA TODAY", by Fr Michael Lapsley. 7.00pm, AVI, Kerr Street, Fitzroy (refer: http://.melbourne.indymedia.org/calendar/event_display_detail.php?event_id=210&day=6&month=11&year=2003)

NOVEMBER 7: ADDRESS, "VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST", by Dr Hanan Ashrawi. National Press Club 12.00 - 2.00pm, Canberra (refer: <http://.npc.org.au/speakers.htm>)

NOVEMBER 10: FORUM, "BLACK HOLES OF ENTRENCHED POVERTY IN AUSTRALIA", by Prof. Tony Vinson. Jesuit Social Services Annual Ignatian Forum. 7.30pm at Collingwood Town Hall, Melbourne. (refer: <http://www.jss.org.au/news/>)

NOVEMBER 10: ADDRESS, "THE WORLD FROM ISLAM: A journey of discovery through the Muslim heartland", by Mr George Negus. National Press Club 12.00 - 2.00pm, Canberra (refer: <http://.npc.org.au/speakers.htm>)

NOVEMBER 10: NATIONAL FORUM, "THE WAR ON TERRORISM AND THE RULE OF LAW". To be convened at NSW Parliament House by the Faculty of Law UNSW and the Gilbert & Tobin Centre of Public Law. Standard rate: \$99. (refer: <http://www.gtcentre.unsw.edu.au/2003%20Terrorism%20Conference%20Brochure.pdf>)

NOVEMBER 12: PUBLIC FORUM, "TRADING AUSTRALIA AWAY? The US Free Trade Agreement", Global Trade Watch. 7.30pm Tomkins on the Swan Convention Centre, cnr Canning Hwy & Dunkley Av., Alfred Cove, Perth. (refer: <http://.active.org.au/perth/calendar/?display=zoom&event=319>)

NOVEMBER 12: SUMMIT, "FORGOTTEN RIGHTS - Responding to the crisis of asylum seekers' health care". Convened by the Asylum Seekers Interest Group of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. 9:00am to 5:00pm, NSW Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney. (refer: <http://.chilout.org/files/ForgottenRightsSummit.pdf>)

NOVEMBER 12 - 14: CONFERENCE, "WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY - Community development, globalisation and the market economy". Convened by the NSW Local Government Community Services Association, Port Macquarie (refer: http://coss.net.au/events/acoss/1054267896_8508_20030530.jsp)

NOVEMBER 13: TRADING AUSTRALIA AWAY? A public forum to debate the important issues of free trade and globalisation, hosted by Anthony Albanese MP. At Marrickville Town Hall, Sydney at 7:30 pm (refer: http://workers.labor.net.au/200/news95_activists.html)

NOVEMBER 13: PERTH LAUNCH, FRANK BRENNAN SJ, "TAMPERING WITH ASYLUM". Launched by Carmen Lawrence MP. At Notre Dame University, 6:30 pm. (refer: http://uniya.org/news/tamper_launch.html)

NOVEMBER 13: PUBLIC MEETING, "THE TRUTH ABOUT AFGHANISTAN", Australian National University, 7.00pm Manning Clark Centre, Theatre 2, Canberra (refer <http://.active.org.au/canberra/calendar/?day=13&month=11>)

NOVEMBER 13 - 14: ACOSS CONGRESS 2003, "PIECING IT TOGETHER - equity, empowerment, change". Rydges Lakeside Hotel, Canberra (refer: http://coss.net.au/events/acoss/1061359192_5137_20030820.jsp)

NOVEMBER 15 - 16: INTERNATIONAL PEACE PILGRIMAGE (for events in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth & Sydney see: <http://www.active.org.au/>)

NOVEMBER 19: MELBOURNE LAUNCH, FRANK BRENNAN SJ, "TAMPERING WITH ASYLUM". Launched by Robert Manne. At Reader's Feast, 6:30 pm. (refer: http://uniya.org/news/tamper_launch.html)

NOVEMBER 20: ADELAIDE LAUNCH, FRANK BRENNAN SJ, "TAMPERING WITH ASYLUM". Launched by Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE. At Imprints Booksellers, 6:00 pm. (refer: http://uniya.org/news/tamper_launch.html)

NOVEMBER 20: SEMINAR, "RECOGNISING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER customary law: International and domestic implications", 3.00pm, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Meeting Room, Level 8 Piccadilly Tower, 133 Castlereagh St, Sydney (Refer: http://.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/index.html)

NOVEMBER 21: LECTURE, "WORKING LIVES: STRUGGLING FOR RECOGNITION - the individual in labour history". Hosted by the University of Sydney. Womens College, University of Sydney (refer: http://coss.net.au/events/acoss/1054265315_6899_20030530.jsp)

NOVEMBER 21-22: CONFERENCE, "BREAKING THE SILENCE: Rethinking poverty in a changing world". Coffs Harbour Education Campus, Hogbin Drive, Coffs Harbour. (refer: <http://.mncrcsd.com.au/conference>)

NOVEMBER 25: BRISBANE LAUNCH, FRANK BRENNAN SJ, "TAMPERING WITH ASYLUM". Launched by Jim Soorley MA and Sallyanne Atkinson AO. At The Ithaca Room, City Hall, 7:30 pm. (refer: http://uniya.org/news/tamper_launch.html)

NOVEMBER 26: SYDNEY LAUNCH, FRANK BRENNAN SJ, "TAMPERING WITH ASYLUM". Launched by Tom Keneally AO. At Gleebooks, 6:30 pm. (refer: http://uniya.org/news/tamper_launch.html)

NOVEMBER 29: NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION of Australia. Will consider current international developments as they affect the United Nations in the wake of the Iraq war. Canberra - for more details call UNAA Administrator on ph: (02) 6257 4609 or e-mail: larkspur@cyberone.com.au

NOVEMBER 30: "PUT HUMAN RIGHTS TO WORK". Address by Julian Burnside QC at the Sunday Service, 10.00am, St Michael's Uniting Church, 120 Collins Street, Melbourne.

DECEMBER 4: CONFERENCE, "HUMAN RIGHTS 2003: THE YEAR IN REVIEW". Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, CUB Malthouse, 113 Sturt Street, Southbank, Melbourne. 9.00am-5.00pm (refer: <http://www.lawconf.monash.org/>)

DECEMBER 3-5: FEDERATION OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES COUNCIL NATIONAL CONFERENCE Theme "Advance Australia Where?" At Federation Square, Melbourne (refer: <http://www.eccv.org.au/feccaconf.html>)

DECEMBER 4-5: A JOURNEY OF HEALING. The 2003 National Indigenous Stolen Generation Conference. At The Mercure, St Leonards, in Sydney (refer: <http://www.community-life.org.au/diary.php#event331>)

DECEMBER 10-12: National Conference on Unemployment. Keynote speakers include Professor Barry Bluestone, Rev Tim Costello. At University of Newcastle (refer: <http://e1.newcastle.edu.au/coffee/conferences/2003>)

(email news of your forthcoming social justice event to: admin@acsjc.org.au)

OCTOBER NEWS MONITOR

POPE URGES INITIATIVES FOR "JUST AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT" - Pope John Paul II appealed for new programs for the "just and sustainable development" of poorer countries in the context of globalisation.

BISHOP INSISTS MOST BOAT PEOPLE GENUINE - Immigration Department figures showing that nine out of ten boat people who made it to Australia's migration zone are granted temporary protection visas, confirmed the integrity of their claims for asylum, Bishop Joseph Grech said.

US BISHOPS BACKING SMALL FARMER OPPOSITION TO FREE TRADE - The Catholic Bishops in the United States are preparing a statement on agriculture that includes support for crop subsidies that preserve the livelihoods of small farmers and their workers.

VATICAN OFFICIAL URGES ADVERTISING THAT PROMOTES HUMAN DIGNITY - Pontifical Council for Social Communications president Archbishop John Foley stressed the importance of a "good name" in advertising.

MIGRATION AGENT INDUSTRY REQUIRES DRAMATIC REFORM - Australia's policy governing the migration agent industry must be dramatically reformed, the independent Catholic based lobbyist Australian Political Ministry Network (PolMin) said recently in response to recently aired refugee visa scams and negligence.

KIMBERLEY DIOCESE WARNS AGAINST IRRIGATION INVASION - The Justice, Ecology and Peace Office (JEP) of the Western Australian Diocese of Broome expressed "grave reservations" about plans to open up new sections of Australia's "pristine" north to irrigators from the south.

COMMISSION CONCERN AT CHINESE PRESIDENT'S VISIT - Melbourne's Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace expressed concern at the visit to Australia of Chinese President Hu Jintao.

CANBERRA BISHOP CHALLENGES BUSH TO WAGE WAR ON POVERTY - Canberra-Goulburn Diocese auxiliary Bishop Pat Power urged US President George Bush to forget about the War on Terror and instead make the world more secure by correcting the imbalance in the distribution of the world's wealth and resources.

MALAYSIAN CATHOLIC HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST JAILED - Activist Irene Fernandez was sentenced to one year in prison after exposing human rights abuses at immigration camps in Malaysia.

CATHOLIC HEALTH SAYS REFORM SHOULD HELP WORKING POOR - Catholic Health Australia called on all parliamentary parties to amend the Medicare package and changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) in the interests of people most disadvantaged in the community.

PERTH ARCHBISHOP URGES GOVT TO FREE CHILDREN FROM IMMIGRATION DETENTION -

Archbishop Barry Hickey called on the Federal Government to release all young children from immigration detention centres, along with their parents or carers so they can live in a normal community setting.

SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL ADDS VOICE TO POVERTY FORUM CALL

- At the conclusion of National Anti-Poverty Week, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) added its name to the list of Catholic organisations calling on the Federal Government to convene a national forum on poverty.

VINNIES SAYS POVERTY A BIPARTISAN NATIONAL ISSUE -

The St Vincent de Paul Society welcomed the call from Federal Opposition Leader Simon Crean to stop the "blame game" and tackle the twin scourges of poverty and inequality through a National Summit.

JESUIT POVERTY STUDY CONFIRMS BUDGET SURPLUS WELFARE PRIORITY -

The latest research by Jesuit Social Services revealed that a quarter of the Victorian Prison population comes from just 2.1% of the state's 647 postcode areas.

NEW ZEALAND BISHOPS HIGHLIGHT SHAME OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT -

The Catholic Bishops of New Zealand last week reaffirmed a Conference resolution intended to highlight the plight of children suffering from verbal, physical and sexual abuse.

CATHOLIC WELFARE CALL TO ACTION ON POVERTY -

As a matter of urgency, Catholic Welfare Australia appealed to all Australians to make clear to political leaders that now is the time to implement a nation building project of poverty eradication and social justice.

CATHOLICS JOIN COMBINED RELIGIOUS CALL TO PM ON POVERTY -

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President Archbishop Francis Carroll joined with other heads of churches and leaders of the Jewish and Islamic faiths in writing to Prime Minister John Howard to urge his support for a national forum on poverty.

BISHOP LEADS TONGANS IN RARE PROTEST AGAINST KING -

Tonga's Bishop Sioane Foliaki led more than 6000 marchers in a protest against changes to the Pacific Island nation's constitution which they say would limit the freedom of the media and give even greater power to King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV.

COMMISSION REACHES OUT TO WOMEN ASYLUM SEEKERS -

The Commission for Australian Catholic Women (CACW) expressed its solidarity with families in detention following a visit and shared meal with women being held in the Woomera Detainee Housing Project in South Australia.

CATHOLIC 'FALSE PASSPORT' CLAIMS SPARK INQUIRY CALLS -

The Sydney-based Edmund Rice Justice Centre told Federal Police that it is ready to provide investigators with evidence that immigration officials urged asylum seekers to get false passports so they could be deported.

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/310>

NOVEMBER SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 7 - WORLD COMMUNITY DAY - World Community Day is held on the first Friday in November. The annual focus is on responsible corporate action for justice and peace. World Community Day began in 1943 from a motion by Mrs Albert Palmer, president of the Chicago Council of Church women, that a day be set aside for the study of peace by church women. World Community Day continues to emphasise peace, but has been broadened to include a vital partner of peace: justice.

NOVEMBER 30 - ADVENT - Today marks the beginning of Advent. This season provides us with a waiting space and a time of preparation for Christmas. During the journey towards Christmas, many people, events and symbols invite us to pause and remember the ongoing presence of God in our lives.

With Mary, we can give birth to Jesus and carry him into our world. With the shepherds, we can glorify and praise God for all we have heard and seen. With the Wise Men, we can search for a deeper understanding of Jesus and follow the star that leads us to him. With the angels, we too can be messengers of God, singing the Good News.

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council Leo XIII House, 19 MacKenzie Street, North Sydney NSW 2060. Tel: (02) 9956 5811, Fax: (02) 9954 0056, Email: admin@acsjc.org.au Website: <http://socialjustice.catholic.org.au> ** ACSJC Briefing is sent by email at the beginning of each month (except January). To subscribe or unsubscribe, go to the front page of the website Comments and contributions are also welcome.