



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

If you cannot read the email version, go to: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/briefing>

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Friends,

The beginning of every new year often finds us making resolutions to change and improve aspects of our lives. Perhaps time for reflection over Christmas and the holiday season brings us an awareness of our gifts and an appreciation for the blessings we have received and we seek to respond to this opportunity by making a resolution that matters.

Since the last ACSJC Briefing was published early December, significant events and memorials have occurred, including: the 5th anniversary of the detention of David Hicks in Guantanamo Bay, the hanging of Saddam Hussein, World Day of Peace and Australia Day. Each of these may provide us with an opportunity for reflection and a resolve to act.

In late December, Saddam Hussein was executed. The Church was unambiguous in its condemnation of the violent hanging of Saddam Hussein, proof that execution dehumanises not just its victims but its perpetrators.

In a Letter to the Editor of Australian Catholic newspapers, Bishop Christopher Saunders said:

The terrible spectacle of the execution of Saddam Hussein should remind all Christians of the pointlessness and obscenity of the death penalty. The Church's teaching on this matter is clear: we do not have the right to take life as punishment, no matter who the criminal is or how terrible the crime.

Capital punishment degrades the authorities who impose it even more than the person who suffers it.

The first day of the year is World Day of Peace. Each year, a papal peace message is published. The opening words of Pope Benedict XVI's message read:

At the beginning of the new year, I wish to extend prayerful good wishes for peace to Governments, leaders of nations and all men and women of good will. In a special way, I invoke peace upon all those experiencing pain and suffering, those living under the threat of violence and armed aggression, and those who await their human and social emancipation, having had their dignity trampled upon. I invoke peace upon children, who by their innocence enrich humanity with goodness and hope, and by their sufferings compel us all to work for justice and peace. Out of concern for children, especially those whose future is compromised by exploitation and the malice of unscrupulous adults, I wish on this World Day of Peace to encourage everyone to reflect on the theme: The Human Person, the Heart of Peace. I am convinced that respect for the person promotes peace and that, in building peace, the foundations are laid for an authentic integral humanism. In this way a serene future is prepared for coming generations.

Resolving to live as a Christian in today's society is a challenge that faces us every day of our lives. To be a follower of Christ means to resolve to change our minds, our hearts, and our lives, resolving to discern not our own wills and desires, but God's. We are continually challenged to embrace change by growing stronger in our faith, by participating more regularly in the life of the Church, and by reaching out to others with compassion and love.

As we move into this new year of 2007,

may we grow into a new way of living and being for ourselves,

our loved ones and our world,

May we become more human,

acting with justice, intelligence, common sense and mercy.

May we become more like the God who is.

May we BE Christian.

Suzette Clark rsc

Research & Projects Officer

CURRENT ISSUES/RESOURCES

BISHOP SAUNDERS AND FR FRANK BRENNAN SPEAK OUT

The Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Bishop Christopher Saunders, has spoken out strongly on the implications of the execution of Saddam Hussein and the continued detention of David Hicks. His letter to the Catholic press is available at <http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/article.php?classID=2&subclassID=5&articleID=2724&class=Comment&subclass=Letters>.

His interview with the *Catholic Weekly* and Fr Frank Brennan's comments on Australian society in the 21st century are available at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/701/140.php>.

FR JOHN DEAR SJ VISITS AUSTRALIA

Peace activist, teacher and writer Fr John Dear SJ is to visit Australia from 22 February to 18 March this year. John Dear, one of the leading voices for peace in the United States, is a former Executive Director of Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Pax Christi USA Ambassador for Peace, the author of 20 books and currently a weekly columnist for the National Catholic Reporter Online. His visit is being sponsored by Pace e Bene Australia and other organisations, and he will be visiting Sydney, Townsville, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart and Canberra. More information is available in our *Events* section and at <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>.

HOLY SEE REAFFIRMS DEATH PENALTY STANCE

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office, reaffirmed the Vatican's condemnation of the death penalty in the wake of the execution of former Iraqi dictator Sadaam Hussein. Father Lombardi said: 'To kill the guilty one is not the way to rebuild justice and to reconcile society. The risk also exists that, on the contrary, the spirit of vengeance will be fuelled and new violence be sown ... one cannot but hope that all those responsible will make every effort so that in a dramatic situation channels of reconciliation and peace will finally be opened.' See http://www.catholiccommunications.com.au/camnews/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=187&Itemid=28.

TIME TO END SCANDAL OF HUNGER, BENEDICT SAYS

In his annual New Year address to the Vatican diplomatic community, Pope Benedict condemned a worsening 'scandal of famine' which he said is 'unacceptable in a world which has the means and knowledge to tackle it'. The Pope urged the Western world to help by 'accelerating the process of cancelling or reducing the debt of the poorest countries'. This should be done without imposing structural reform measures which would be 'disastrous for the most vulnerable populations', Pope Benedict added. Refer: <http://www.cathnews.com/news/701/43.php>

POPE BENEDICT XVI APPEALS FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Pope Benedict has referred to the need for 'new ways of rationality' following the recent outbursts of violence in Lebanon and between Hamas and Fatah forces in Gaza. The Pope appealed for dialogue, saying he was saddened by the pain inflicted on the Lebanese and Palestinians populations. 'I feel immense pain for that dear population, and I know that many Lebanese face the temptation of abandoning all hope,' the Pope said. For more information, refer to <http://www.cathnews.com/news/701/148.php>.

NEW BOOK ON INDONESIA-AUSTRALIA RELATIONS LAUNCHED

Uniya has launched its latest publication on Australia's relations with Indonesia, *Good Neighbour, Bad Neighbour*. The book explores the possibilities and pitfalls of the Australia-Indonesia relationship. Topics include the new security treaty between the two neighbours, the nature of diplomacy, East Timor and Papua, and regional terrorism. Contributors represent the speakers from the Uniya Seminar Series 2006 held in August. They include Fr Frank Brennan, Dr John Bruni, Duncan Campbell, Sidney Jones, Tony Kevin, Professor Peter King, Professor Damien Kingsbury, Professor Adrian Vickers and Richard Woolcott.

The book was launched in Sydney by Julie Morgan, Promoter of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Friars. *Good Neighbour, Bad Neighbour: Australia's relations with Indonesia* (ISBN 0-9803022-1-8. pbk. \$15) is available exclusively from Uniya. An order form can be downloaded at <http://www.uniya.org>. The text of Julie Morgan's speech is also available on the website.

NUNS UNITE TO PLEDGE SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Religious leaders representing three thousand Catholic nuns today pledged their support for Indigenous people in November 2006, on the 20th Anniversary of Pope John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Alice Springs. The Sisters of St Joseph and the Sisters of Mercy throughout Australia have resolved to stand with Aboriginal people in their struggle for basic human rights.

Sr Katrina Brill, a Congregational Leader of the Sisters of St Joseph speaking in conjunction with Sr Caroline Ryan, Vice-President of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia said 'We call on all people of good will in this country to ensure that every Australian has, by right, a standard of living commensurate with citizenship in a developed country. After all, where one person is diminished, all are diminished.'

BRISBANE'S CENTRE FOR MULTICULTURAL PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER

The Centre For Multicultural Pastoral Care in Brisbane issues an email newsletter, *What's Up?* You can view it through their website, <http://www.multiculturalcare.org.au/index.htm>.

COMPENDIUM OF SOCIAL DOCTRINE

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church is a most helpful resource. If you do not yet have a hard copy of the Compendium you can access it electronically at:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

VATICAN WEBPAGE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE.

The Holy See has established a Website dedicated to information about, and formation in, justice and peace. The initiative was launched by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, whose president is Cardinal Renato Martino. For now, the Web page will publish information in Spanish, Italian, English and French on ecclesial documents, congresses, statements of representatives of the Church. The Web page also gives information about the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, as well as its members. Visit: <http://www.justpax.it>

UNIYA PUBLICATION: 'JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION IN EAST TIMOR'

Coinciding with the lanches of the final report of East Timor's Reception, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CAVR) around Australia, Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre has published a the booklet, *Justice and Reconciliation in East Timor – Australian and the CAVR*. It has been produced to give Australians a better understanding of the final report of the CAVR, especially as it relates to Australia. For further information contact Uniya on (02) 9356 3888 or reception@uniya.org (Refer: <http://www.uniya.org.au>)

CENTRE FOR AN ETHICAL SOCIETY

Following the launch of the Centre for an Ethical Society by Sir Gerard Brennan, former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, in Sydney on 21 November, considerable discussion has taken place on the mission and aims of the Centre. You can read Sir Gerard's launch address and other papers on the Centre's website at <http://www.ces.org.au>.

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or download an order form from the ACSJC website:
<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/CONTENT/PDF/TEMPLATE-ORDERFORM.pdf>)

ORDER NOW! - 2007 SOCIAL JUSTICE DIARY

The 2007 Diary focuses on the theme of globalisation. It includes the dates of significant events, anniversaries and special days which celebrate particular aspects of social justice and highlight the theme, and 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: \$6.60 (inc. GST), plus postage. To download an order form, go to:
http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_calendar.html.

2006 SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY STATEMENT

This year's Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Sunday Statement is entitled 'The Heart of Our Country - dignity and justice for our Indigenous sisters and brothers'. An order form for the Statement is available on the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>. The Statement can be downloaded at: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au> and <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/latest.html>. For associated resources visit the ACSJC website or call (02) 9956 5811.

SERIES PAPER: CHOICE FOR WHOM? A DISCUSSION OF THE 2005 INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LAWS

Catholic Social Justice Series No 58. At a time when Australia's industrial relations laws are undergoing radical change, Dr Tim Battin offers an analysis of the theory underpinning the 2005 industrial relations legislation, and measures that rationale against the precepts of Catholic social teaching. In addition to considering the legislation's moral implications, Dr Battin discusses some of its likely practical and social effects.

SERIES PAPER: CATHOLICS AND NATURE: TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES IN AUSTRALIA

Catholic Social Justice Series No 57. Concern for the environment has played a significant role in the Catholic Church in Australia since the 19th century. Fr Charles Rue SSC traces the development of environmental thought in Australian Catholicism.

(\$6.60 a copy, plus postage. Postage rates for Catholic Social Justice Series Papers: 1 copy \$1; 2-3 copies \$1.45; 4-5 copies \$2.45)

FEBRUARY NOTICES

22 FEBRUARY TO 18 MARCH, 2007. FR JOHN DEAR SJ VISITS AUSTRALIA. Pace e Bene Australia and other organisations are sponsoring the Australian tour of Father John Dear SJ.

Details of Fr Dear's Australian engagements for February and early March are below. Details for those for later in March will appear in our next briefing. For more information about him and full details of his visit to Australia, go to <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>.

3 FEBRUARY. SOLIDARITY DINNER WITH TERRY HICKS (VIC). All money raised goes to Terry Hicks's campaign fund. Organised by Civil Rights Defence and sponsored by the Moreland City Council. After dinner speech by Terry Hicks and others. \$30/\$25 per head. Coburg Town Hall,

90 Bell Street, Coburg. Tickets must be purchased in advance from the New International Bookshop, Trades Hall, cnr Lygon and Victoria Sts, Carlton or phone (03) 9662 3744. Tables of 10 can also be booked. Web:

http://www.melbourne.indymedia.org/calendar/event_display_detail.php?event_id=3910&day=3&month=2&year=2007

4 FEBRUARY. SEMINAR WITH DIARMUID O’MURCHU – ‘NOURISHING THE IMAGINATION IN THE SERVICE OF JUSTICE’ (NSW). Presented by Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace. Cost: \$30, including lunch and morning tea. 10am–3pm, Bankstown Trotting Club, 178 Eldridge Rd, Bankstown. Email: ccjp@bigpond.com; Phone 02 9745 0820. Web: www.ccjpoz.org.

6 FEBRUARY. CANBERRA CONVERGENCE FOR DAVID HICKS (ACT). Bring David Home campaigners will converge on the Federal Parliament for its opening Tuesday 6 February 2007. Information: 0401 758 871 or 0403 037 376.

A bus to the Canberra Rally will be departing from Sydney’s Central Station outside the Country Link terminal (entrance through Pitt St) at 6.30am on Tuesday 6 February. It will make the return journey to Sydney at about 2.30 pm.

9 FEBRUARY. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SPONSORS A WEEKLY VIGIL FOR DAVID HICKS (VIC). A regular vigil for David Hicks will be held every Friday 12.00 pm to 1.00 pm until David is brought home. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Casseldon Place (cnr. Lonsdale & Spring Streets), Melbourne. Please wear orange and tell your friends.

13 FEBRUARY. ‘SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE: WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO ACT?’ (NSW). The Edmund Rice Centre invites you to join us for Afternoon Tea for the Future. No need to RSVP. Just come along. 1.30pm, The Edmund Rice Centre, Level 1, 9 Alexandra Ave (cnr Monash) Croydon. Inquiries: email jillf@erc.org.au or phone (02) 9745 9700.

16 FEBRUARY. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SPONSORS A WEEKLY VIGIL FOR DAVID HICKS (VIC). See entry for 9 February.

16 FEBRUARY. CONFERENCE – ‘HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION (HRE) IS A HUMAN RIGHT’ (VIC). Presented by the University of Melbourne’s Faculty of Education, and the Human Rights Forum. Speakers include the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser, the Hon Dr Barry Jones and the Hon John von Doussa QC (President, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission). Cost: \$80/\$100 (includes morning tea and lunch). 8:30 am – 4:00 pm, Level 1, Sidney Myer Asia Centre, The University of Melbourne. Enquiries and RSVP: (03) 8344 4259; email hillf@unimelb.edu.au. Web: www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/news/calendar/.

16–17 FEBRUARY. CONFERENCE – ‘RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE: THE CALL TO “ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION”’. Co-sponsored by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Brisbane and the Social Action Office, CLRIQ. Invitees include Dr Clyde Wild (Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Innovative Conservation Strategies, Griffith University), Dr Veronica Lawson (former Senior Lecturer in Theology, Australian Catholic University, Ballarat Campus), Mr Col Brown (Executive Officer, Catholic Earthcare Australia). \$50/\$30 concession, including refreshments and Saturday lunch. St James’ College, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane. Email: emericka@bne.catholic.net.au; Tel: (07) 3336 9351; mail: CJPC, GPO Box 282, Brisbane Q 4001; web: http://sao.clriq.org.au/climate_change.html.

17 FEBRUARY. ADDRESSING GLOBAL JUSTICE ISSUES AT THE UN – HUMAN TRAFFICKING: SLAVERY IN OUR WORLD (VIC). Guest Speaker: Catherine Ferguson SNJM UNANIMA International. 9.30 am–12.30 pm, followed by light lunch. Kildara Centre, Rear 39 Stanhope St Malvern, Melbourne. Contact: Louise Cleary, clousie@brigidine.org.au or (03) 9686 3637.

20 FEBRUARY. LECTURE – ‘CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AND BEYOND’ (VIC). Speaker: Professor Paul Marcus, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, USA. Inaugural Peter Brett Memorial Lecture, Melbourne Law School. 6 pm, 185 Pelham Street, Carlton. RSVP required: law-rsvp@unimelb.edu.au (‘Peter Brett’ in heading please). Further details: (03) 8344 1153.

21 FEBRUARY. SEMINAR – ‘TEEMING VOIDS: INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AUTHORITY, TORTURE, AND THE CLAIM TO CONSCIENCE’ (ACT). Dr Fleur Johns, University of Sydney Faculty of Law. Presented by Centre for International and Public Law, Australian National University. Wednesday 21 February 2006, 1.00 pm (Sandwiches served from 12.45pm) Staff Library Level 1, ANU College of Law, Cnr Fellows & East Roads. RSVP to: cipl@law.anu.edu.au by cob 20 February 2006 Enquiries: 6125 0454 or cipl@law.anu.edu.au.

22 FEBRUARY. LECTURE – ‘WHY REFUGEE LAW STILL MATTERS’ (VIC). Speaker: Professor James Hathaway, University of Michigan Law School, USA. 25th Allen Hope Southey Memorial Lecture, Melbourne Law School. 6 pm, 185 Pelham Street, Carlton. RSVP required: cipl@law.anu.edu.au (‘Southey’ in heading please). Further details: 03 8344 1153.

22 FEBRUARY. LECTURE BY FR JOHN DEAR SJ: ‘JESUS AND NONVIOLENCE’ (NSW). Respondent: Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon. 7.00 for 7:30pm Australian Catholic University, North Sydney Campus, Edward St, Nth Sydney. Presented by Pace e Bene Australia. For more information and details, and to RSVP, email justinw@nsw.uca.org.au or gill.burrows@madtechnology.net or call (02) 8267 4241. Web: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>.

23–25 FEBRUARY. ‘EXPLORING GOSPEL NONVIOLENCE’: WEEKEND RETREAT WITH FR JOHN DEAR SJ (NSW). Sunday 25 Feb Marist Hermitage, Old South Rd, Mittagong. Presented by Pace e Bene Australia. For more information and details, and to RSVP, email justinw@nsw.uca.org.au or gill.burrows@madtechnology.net or call (02) 8267 4241. Web: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>.

23 FEBRUARY. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SPONSORS A WEEKLY VIGIL FOR DAVID HICKS (VIC). See entry for 9 February.

24 FEBRUARY. YOUTH OFF THE STREETS PRESENTS YOUTH FOR YOUTH BENEFIT CONCERT (NSW). Talented musicians David Sanders and Travis Collins are organising a benefit/concert on behalf of Youth Off the Streets. All welcome. Tickets \$70, including dinner and entertainment. Campbelltown Catholic Club. Bookings: (02) 4625 0000. Web: <http://www.youthoffthestreets.com.au/events/index.html>

26 FEBRUARY. FR JOHN DEAR SJ SPEAKS IN TOWNSVILLE (QLD). 7.30pm; donation \$10.00. St Margaret Mary’s Theatre, Crowle St, Hermit Park.

For more information, phone (07) 4728 9861 or email thehouse@beyond.net.au. Web: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>.

27 FEBRUARY. HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE PRESENTED BY THE VICTORIAN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION (VIC). Those making presentations include Sir Nigel Rodley (UK), Dr Sima Samar (Afghanistan) and Major Michael Mori (USA). Registration: \$120 per person, or \$60 per person for non-government organisations (costs include GST). Closing date for registrations: Monday 12 February 2007. ANZ Pavilion, Melbourne Arts Centre, St Kilda Rd. Website: <http://www.eoc.vic.gov.au/conference/>. Email: catherine.h.smith@eoc.vic.gov.au. Enquiries: (03) 9281 7105.

28 FEBRUARY. FR JOHN DEAR SJ IN CONVERSATION: ‘JESUS AND THE WAY OF NONVIOLENCE’ (QLD). John Dear will be joined in conversation with Professor Toh Swee-Hin and Dr Anne Hickling-Hudson, facilitated by David Busch. Sponsored by Pace e Bene Australia and supported by the Social Action Office – Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Qld. 7.00 for 7.30pm, the Dodge Lane Theatre Complex, All Hallows’ School, 547 Ann Street, Brisbane. \$20 and \$15 concession. Registration with payment essential by 2 February 2007. Enquiries: PO Box 8304, Woolloongabba Qld 4102; Phone (07) 3891 5866; Email sao.admin@sao.criq.org.au. Web: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>.

1 MARCH. PUBLIC MEETING – ‘NUCLEAR AUSTRALIA?’ (VIC). Speakers: Dr. Helen Caldicott; Rebecca Bear-Wingfield (Kokotha leader, reporting on the World Indigenous Uranium Summit); Dr. Tilman Ruff (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear weapons [MAPW]); Dave Sweeney (Australian Conservation Foundation). 6 pm, Fitzroy Town Hall.

1 MARCH. RETREAT AND WORKSHOP WITH JOHN DEAR SJ AND OTHERS – ‘THE ROAD TO PEACE: THE WAY OF NON-VIOLENCE’ (QLD). Sponsored by Pace e Bene Australia and supported by the Social Action Office – Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Qld. 8.45am for 9.00am to 4.00pm, Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University (Building N35). Co-facilitators: Toh Swee-Hin and Virginia Cawagas. \$100 and \$60 concession. Places are strictly limited to 50; completed registration form with full payment essential to secure your place. Enquiries: PO Box 8304, Woolloongabba Qld 4102; phone (07) 3891 5866; email sao.admin@sao.criq.org.au. Web: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>.

2 MARCH. TALK BY FR JOHN DEAR SJ: ‘JESUS THE REBEL AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE’ (WA). 7.00–9.00 pm, Christian Centre For Social Action, 879 Albany Hwy, East Vic Park. Cost: \$5 – \$10 Contact: Peter Stewart (08) 9472 4227 or email ccsa@arach.net.au. Web: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>

3–4 MARCH. RETREAT WITH FR JOHN DEAR SJ: ‘JESUS AND NONVIOLENCE – DEEPENING THE JOURNEY’ (WA). Penola, Josephite Retreat Centre, Safety Bay. 9am Saturday 3 March – 5pm Sunday 4 March. Cost: \$150–175 Contact: Grace Reid (08) 9444 7808 or email hibby@mac.com. Web: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/johndearinaust.html>

DECEMBER-JANUARY NEWS MONITOR

Mining companies modern "Trojans", says Filipino bishop

Denouncing mining companies working in the Philippines as modern-day Trojan horses, Filipino Bishop Zacarias Jimenez endorsed a major Columban-commissioned report which accused the country of being "among the worst countries in the world" for various mining practices.

Benedict appeals again to end Mid-East violence

Reacting to deadly clashes between supporters and opponents of Lebanon's government and between Hamas and Fatah forces in Gaza, Pope Benedict renewed his appeal for an end to violence in the region while emphasising the need for "new ways of rationality".

Catholic social justice advocates prominent in honours list

The Adelaide archdiocese's Vicar-General Msgr David Cappo, Melbourne Jesuit Fr Peter Norden and several Vinnies workers, including Loreto Sister Toni Matha, were among the prominent Catholics cited in this year's Australia Day Honours.

Pakistan to loosen blasphemy laws

A senior Pakistani government official indicated that the country's harsh blasphemy laws, which Christians and rights groups say are used by Muslims to oppress minorities, will be modified after the forthcoming national elections.

Drop all charges against Hicks: bishop said

Welcoming news that charges against Guantanamo prisoner David Hicks may be downgraded, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council chief, Bishop Christopher Saunders said that respect for natural justice should lead prosecutors to drop all charges against him.

Payment cuts to pregnant woman not on: Catholic welfare chief

Withdrawing welfare payments was not the way to help people into jobs, Catholic Social Services director, Francis Quinlan, said after reports emerged of a four-months pregnant unemployed woman whose welfare payments were cut off for eight weeks for breaching Centrelink requirements.

Catholic groups mobilise for world forum

Christian lay leaders cannot work separately from mainstream justice lobby groups, said a Bangladeshi Catholic youth leader, explaining why so many Catholics are involved in the massive World Social Forum gathering of civil groups being held this week in Nairobi, Kenya.

Vinnies launches drought appeal for NSW farmers

With drought affecting 93% of NSW, the St Vincent de Paul Society launched an urgent appeal for drought victims who face stress and "are also feeling the knock-on effects of the drought."

Toowoomba diocese welcomes Tamworth refugee about face

Toowoomba diocese social justice coordinator, Dr Mark Copland, welcomed an about-face by Tamworth Regional Council over an earlier decision to refuse to relocate Sudanese refugee families to the north-western NSW centre.

Sydney parish battles DIMIA over deportation

The Catholic Social Justice Group of Manly parish on Sydney's North Shore was campaigning on behalf of a Muslim Pakistani who lived in Australia for 19 years but who faces deportation after a visa mix-up.

Benedict calls on Jews, Christians to cooperate for peace

Speaking at his Wednesday general audience, Pope Benedict called for Christians and Jews to respect and appreciate each other and to cooperate for justice and peace in the world.

Jerusalem Christian leaders offer to mediate for Palestinians

Warning that warring Palestinian factions could trigger a civil war, Christian church leaders in Jerusalem are urging an end to the violence and offering to play a mediating role between Hamas and Fatah.

Don't cry for Saddam: Pell

Saddam Hussein was in the "front rank of evildoers", Sydney Archbishop George Pell said in his newspaper column, adding that although the Church opposes capital punishment he did not weep for the executed Iraqi dictator.

Pope calls for legal migration and family reunion measures

Lamenting the "painful" condition of many migrants, refugees and exiles, Pope Benedict called for recognition of the difficulties of migrant families and concrete measures to favour their legal immigration and to keep families united.

Cowra family in last minute immigration reprieve

A family of Taiwanese origin whose children attend the local Catholic school in Cowra, central NSW, have won a last minute review of an Immigration Department decision ordering the family to leave the country because their small organic farm is not profitable enough.

Tamworth priest slams "heartless" Council refugee decision

Parish priest of St Nicholas, Tamworth, Fr Richard Gleeson said that the council's decision to stop the NSW city from becoming a resettlement centre for refugees is "heartless".

Beer slab donation not enough to make poverty history

Compared to money spent on Christmas, Caritas Australia chief Jack de Groot said that Australians can do a lot better to alleviate poverty than the \$43 average donation - the price of a slab of beer - to development agencies in 2005.

Townsville Church concern over Palm Island decision

Townsville Church leaders are concerned about the impact on Indigenous communities of the decision not to prosecute a Queensland police officer over the death of Palm Island man Mulrunji Doomadgee.

Church leaders petition Tamworth over refugee decision

Leaders from the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting churches have met with the Tamworth mayor in a bid to convince the council to keep an open mind on the resettlement of refugees after it last week refused to resettle five Sudanese refugee families in the NSW town.

Mining to blame for typhoon deaths, Filipino priest says

Landslides caused by mining methods were to blame for the deaths of 13 parishioners at a parish on Rapu Rapu island, Philippines, a local priest said, but a representative of Australian-managed Lafayette Mining denied the claims.

No sanctions for Fiji, Archbishop pleads

Fiji Archbishop Petero Mataka appealed to the international community to either lift or postpone sanctions against the Pacific island nation, saying they may serve to strengthen sympathy for last week's military coup.

Citizenship test harsh, exploitative

Sydney's vicar for immigration slammed the Government's proposed citizenship test, saying it could "exploit those who are disadvantaged", while the bishops' spokesman on migration issues, Bishop Joseph Grech said Australia's bishops are opposed to the test.

Stop Darfur violence, Holy See tells UN

The Holy See called on United Nations members to act immediately to stop the horrific violence in Sudan's Darfur region, including killing of children, rape of girls and burning of villages.

Mercy award to Brisbane justice and peace worker

The Mercy Foundation made its annual social justice award to Peter Arndt of the Brisbane Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in recognition of his work to bring an Indigenous Australian perspective to the Commission's work.

Faith communities unite on climate change

Representatives of organisations from 16 Australian faith communities will launch a statement of common belief on climate change in what is described as a world first show of interfaith unity on the issue.

Try Hicks or bring him home, Bishops tell Govt

Describing as "unacceptable" the situation of David Hicks, who now been imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay for five years, Australia's bishops say that if Hicks a case to answer he should be tried without further delay.

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/612> and <http://www.cathnews.com/news/701>

Pressure builds on Government over David Hicks

Calls for the repatriation of David Hicks have come from former Liberal Victoria Premier Jeff Kennett and Jodeen Carney, the Leader of the Opposition in the Northern Territory (Refer: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/hicks-repatriation-overdue-kennett/2007/01/21/1169330766419.html> and <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200701/s1835804.htm>).

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has set the middle of February as a deadline for the United States to lay charges against Mr Hicks or repatriate him. (Refer: <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/news/stories/s1832076.htm>).

The US has set rules for the trial of Guantanamo Bay inmates accused of terrorism, but these rules have been widely criticised (Refer: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200701/s1829686.htm>).

FEBRUARY SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

2 FRI - World Wetlands Day: Theme: Wetlands and Fisheries

4 SUN - 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time: World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life – instituted by John Paul II in 1997

5 MON - Cape York Heads of Agreement signed, 1996

6 TUE - Waitangi Day, Aotearoa New Zealand

11 SUN - 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time: World Day of the Sick – Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

12 MON - The Freedom Ride commenced, journeying through NSW country towns to raise awareness of racism against Aboriginals, 1965. This was re-enacted in 2005.

18 SUN - 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Chinese New Year: The Year of the Pig

21 WED - Ash Wednesday; International Mother Language Day, originating from Bangladesh
Martyrs Day

25 SUN - 1st Sunday of Lent

Notes on these dates are available in the printed ACSJC Social Justice Diary (cost \$6.60, to order go to http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_calendar.html, or cal 02 9956 5811)

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL Leo XIII House, 19 MacKenzie Street, PO Box 1615, North Sydney NSW 2059. 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.