

**Address of Mr Simon McKeon
Executive Chairperson of the Macquarie Bank's Melbourne Office**

at the launch of

Catholic Social Justice Series No. 53

Ending Hunger - How far can we go?

**Melbourne Town Hall
Wednesday, 15 June 2005**

Ladies & gentlemen, I am delighted and honoured to be invited to respond to Cardinal Cassidy and complement what he has said.

At the outset, I need to declare to all of you that my wife and I have 4 teenage boys. As you will appreciate, we have lots of testosterone in our household, our discussions are lively and the exchanges are often colourful.

Nevertheless, as a parent, I am privileged to have a direct insight into the language of Generation Y. And I would like to share with you a group of words that are used, in a derogatory way, to describe others.

For example, there are "Try Hards". These are people who, as the name suggests, apply themselves diligently. They sit at the front of classrooms, listen to teachers and always submit homework on time.

Then there are "Randoms". These are ordinary individuals who just happen to be in a particular place at a particular time minding their own business. A distinguishing feature is that they are not directly known to the person who has nominated them as a Random.

And finally, there are those who are "Tight". They are selfish, inward looking, un-cooperative. As parents, we are often described as tight when declining a request.

Even my children acknowledge that it is appropriate, from time to time, to be a Try Hard. Some things are worth striving for. Similarly, it is fine to be a Random, a person without a label, such as when you happen to secretly barrack for Essendon and find yourself on a train crammed full of Collingwood supporters angry after yet another defeat.

But on no account, in my experience, would anyone want to be known as "Tight".

But that is how so much of the Two Thirds world sees the West today. We are inward looking, un-cooperative, uncaring – we are tight.

But there is hope - these are exciting times. We have:-

- Last Saturday's announcement of massive debt forgiveness to the poorest nations
- The forthcoming G8 summit, where more announcements are anticipated
- The Live 8 concerts on July 2nd
- The Davos agenda earlier this year which gave prominence to the plight of the Two Thirds world
- 2005 as the United Nations International Year of Microcredit, which is such an effective tool
- And, of course, the massive response to the Tsunami several months ago.

Now not enough progress is being made quickly enough, but the good news is that slowly and surely we in the West are becoming better educated and more aware of the issue. And widespread awareness is, I believe, an absolute precondition before anything truly significant can be achieved in eradicating extreme poverty.

And just as slavery came to no longer be tolerated after a lifetime of campaigning by William Wilberforce, I believe that we are on a path to no longer tolerating the slavery of today which is an impoverished third world. But we are not there yet, it is still too easy to turn a blind eye. And that is precisely what Wilberforce sought to correct. If I may quote from Marjie Bloy's "Age of Peel":-

"The campaign to abolish slavery continued in Britain. Wilberforce and his co-workers held meetings all over the country to try to persuade people that abolition should be supported. They discovered that many people were unaware of the horrors of slavery and that others were not interested in something which happened thousands of miles away."

How true this remains today.

And this is why I am pleased to be here at this launch. Bruce Duncan's booklet is another integral component of the awareness program, some might describe it as a conversion, that we must have. "Ending Hunger – How Far Can We Go?" is a powerful text, packed full of facts and figures and justification for why we can no longer accept or tolerate extreme poverty. I encourage all of you to read it and commend the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council for having published it.

But, of course, there are always counter arguments.

With the anti slavery movement, there was concern expressed that if slavery was abolished, the then economy would collapse.

Today, especially in Europe and North America, we hear that the reduction of agricultural trade barriers, which many would agree is a necessary pre-requisite before there is any hope for the Two Thirds world, will lead to hardship for Western farmers. And this is no doubt true, at least in part.

But until we achieve real reform in the area of tariffs, our generation will have to explain to future generations why we tolerated a regime where economic resources were directed artificially and inefficiently to one place and away from another place which was frankly more deserving. In any event, even the slave owners almost 200 years ago were granted compensation by the State and I'm sure we have the ability to develop appropriate solutions if only we, as the community at large, has the will.

Another counter argument is that all we are likely to do is to line the pockets of corrupt leaders and officials. And there are other disingenuous comments about the naivety of some of those promoting reform.

For example, just in the last 24 hours, the Australian Financial Review had an editorial which said:-

“The leaders of the world’s industrial nations have done a disservice to the world’s poor. Superficially, deciding to wipe out \$US40 billion (\$52 billion) in dept owed by the world’s poorest countries looks a generous act.....Many corrupt government officials and pocket-lining businesses in those countries will be seen to have escaped accountability.”

And in an article by Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen in yesterday’s Australian, they wrote:-

“Live 8 has one saving grace. While the politics of the event will be childish, at least the music on offer will be immeasurably better than the ‘80’s new-wave poseurs who dominated Live Aid. Enjoy the music. Then find out what’s really going on in the world.”

I have to say this morning that there is no place for this type of negativity because the situation is simply too dire. There is no room for esoteric debate, only constructive solutions.

If we in the West genuinely resolved to end extreme poverty and applied, in partnership with our poorer neighbours, our best minds to tackle the problem, then without any shadow of doubt in my mind, it would happen.

Yes, it may come at a slight cost to our economic prosperity but who needs an extra cup of coffee per day anyway? And at the end of the day, this is all we are talking about.

And yes, it will take place over a longer time frame in some places than others because of governments that do not put their peoples' interests first. But if there is the will, we will get there.

In closing, may I just mention that the business world generally is not playing much of a role yet but I believe it can and will. I say this as much as anything because of what occurred with the Tsunami earlier this year.

The wave of sympathy that spread throughout Australia invoked every major business to respond. What occurred inside our corporations was largely unprecedented as employees suggested, and in some cases insisted, that their employers respond generously. We live in an era where procuring and retaining human capital is a major challenge. Corporations want to be seen as responsible and responsive employers. And therein lies another reason why widespread awareness is so important.

When stamping out extreme poverty becomes important to the people of Australia and the western world generally, corporations will follow quickly with a serious level of support.

So I commend to you again "Ending Hunger" and congratulate Bruce on its release. And I encourage us all to do everything we can so that future generations will not look back and say that, whilst we had the opportunity to make a profound difference to the lives of many, we elected to remain "tight".