

**Speech at the Launch of the  
Australian Catholic Bishops'**

**Social Justice Sunday Statement 2010**

*Violence in Australia  
A message of peace*

**Given by**

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Let me thank Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir and Brendan McKeague for their inspiring contributions this morning in launching the Social Justice Sunday Statement for 2010. I am also grateful to the many people who have been involved in the drafting, editing and production of this Statement.

It's worth reflecting on the moment in history at which we are issuing this Statement. We are coming to the end both of the United Nations' *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World* and the World Council of Churches' *Decade to Overcome Violence*.

In the message at the beginning of this Statement, I refer to some key goals of these decades:

- the promotion of fundamental human rights
- addressing wide varieties of violence – direct and structural – in homes, communities and in the international arenas
- learning from local and regional ways of overcoming violence.

The thoughts behind the *Decade to Overcome Violence*, in particular, are deeply relevant for anybody reading this Statement. The World Council of Churches says that during this decade, we have been called:

- to work together for peace, justice, and reconciliation at all levels
- to interact and collaborate with local communities, and people of other living faiths, so as to prevent violence and promote a culture of peace

- to walk with people who are systematically oppressed by violence, and to act in solidarity with all struggling for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation
- to repent for our complicity in violence, and to engage in theological reflection to overcome the spirit, logic, and practice of violence.

I hope that as you read through this Statement, you will find passages that resonate with these aims.

It is easy to think that we live in a world that encourages only aggression, reprisal and violence. One task of this Statement has been to look for examples of women and men who hear and act on Christ's call for peace. The Statement opens with one such story – the mother of the young man fatally injured in a street fight. She did not call for vengeance, for retribution; in fact, in her grief she found time to think of the man who was responsible for her son's death.

The Statement goes on to speak of other examples: St Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day, Pope John Paul II and Sister Irene McCormack, who stood and died in solidarity with the villagers she had been sent to help. Here in Australia, in the field of Indigenous justice, there is the work of Mick and Pat Dodson, of Lowitja O'Donoghue, of Larissa Behrendt, and scores of other leaders who have been courageous, tireless, nonviolent workers for justice.

We are honoured to be guests this morning of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart – the order that the soon-to-be named Saint Mary MacKillop founded in 1866. We should pay tribute to the commitment of these Sisters in East Timor, in my own diocese of Broome, and in South America, where one of them whom I've just mentioned – Irene McCormack – worked and died.

We can also think of the work of countless religious and lay women and men who have done great work in the area of justice and peace.

One of the great good news stories in this Statement is the 'NO MORE' initiative by Aboriginal men in the Northern Territory, who joined together to take a stand against violence in the home and to strengthen family life – who claimed the name of Strong Men because they had renounced violence, not embraced it.

And acknowledging the contribution that Brendan McKeague has made today, let us give thanks for organisations like Pace e Bene, who remind us that to work for peace is the opposite of passivity. To quote the Statement: 'To work for peace is to build a robust, participatory and mature society that is respectful of human rights and the development of people as God intended.'

One of the most inspiring aspects of this aspect of our religious life is the way all Christian denominations call with one voice for peace and justice. We congratulate the National Council of Churches of Australia for their Social Justice Sunday resource *Peace Be With You: Witnessing to peace in a violent world*, and we thank God for the work of all Christians in the cause of peace.

All the people I've mentioned, and the many whom I haven't mentioned, stand as witness to the power of Christ's vision for peace.

In closing, let me recall the words of Pope Benedict's Encyclical *Charity in Truth*, quoted in the Statement, referring to the 'astonishing experience of gift'. He says:

*Gratuitousness is present in our lives in many different forms which often go unrecognised because of a purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life. The human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his transcendent dimension.*

We pray that we will be empowered to see our lives as a gift to each other and to God, serving our fellow humans the way Christ saw himself. When we see ourselves like that, violence becomes unthinkable. We are on earth to fulfil a sacred destiny of peace and wholeness – to fulfil, in the words of this Statement:

*the sacredness that is in the deepest part of our being – the sacredness that is the presence of the God of peace in our world.*