

# **Social Justice Statement 2013–2014**

## **LAZARUS AT OUR GATE**

**A CRITICAL MOMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST WORLD POVERTY**

## Chairman's message

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, I present the 2013–2014 Social Justice Statement, *Lazarus at Our Gate: A critical moment in the fight against world poverty*.

This year, as the target date for the Millennium Development Goals draws near, Australia's Catholic bishops are urging Australians to confront the challenge of world poverty. The title and theme of the Statement come from Jesus' parable of Lazarus, who sits unnoticed at the gate of the rich man.

In confronting that challenge, we need to acknowledge the undoubted successes of the Millennium Development Goals campaign. For example, as the Statement points out, the proportion of people in the world living in extreme poverty has been halved since 1990. That is only one of the great achievements brought about by work towards the MDGs and proves that development aid works.

These achievements also call us to think hard about the important tasks still ahead of us. The benchmark for extreme poverty is an income of \$1.25 per day. Can we as Christians really say that that is sufficient? Can we stand by while each year a quarter of a million women die in childbirth, or while malnutrition kills eight million children and confers a legacy of disease and stunted growth on hundreds of millions more?

Once we have understood that the struggle against profound poverty has produced real achievements, we need to ask where the real faces of poverty are to be found today. This Statement suggests five examples of areas where the world needs to focus its effort: those who are hungriest; those most vulnerable to disasters; Indigenous peoples; those with disabilities; and those uprooted from their homelands by conflict or oppression.

People in circumstances like these were central to Christ's mission on earth. These are the ones he went out of his way to hear and to serve. As Christians, we are called to be inspired by and to imitate his care and to make their needs our needs. Pope Paul VI called us to build a world where 'Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man'.

Jesus, our God and guide, sat down at such a table. He also left us, in the Eucharist, a sacramental gift that, as the Statement says, 'satisfies our spiritual hunger but reminds us of the bounty of God's table'. We pray that in that gift we can remember Christ's own call to care for the most vulnerable in our world.

With every blessing,

Christopher A Saunders DD  
Bishop of Broome  
Chairman, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

## LAZARUS AT OUR GATE

### A CRITICAL MOMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST WORLD POVERTY

*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony ...' (Luke 16:19–31)*

This famous parable, one of the great passages calling Christians to a commitment to work for the poor and marginalised, is the Gospel for the last Sunday in September 2013 – Social Justice Sunday.

This year we, the Catholic Bishops of Australia, have chosen the issue of world poverty as the theme for our 2013–2014 Social Justice Statement. In doing so, we are inspired by the compelling call of Jesus himself in his teachings and parables.

We are also conscious that, although enormous progress has been made in alleviating poverty throughout the world, there is still a great amount left to achieve. It is estimated that by 2015 almost one billion people will be living on an income of less than \$1.25 a day.<sup>1</sup> Over a quarter of a million women still die in childbirth annually. As many as eight million children die every year from malnutrition and preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, measles and malaria.<sup>2</sup> One in eight of the world's people does not get adequate nutrition.<sup>3</sup>

Australia remains a prosperous nation, despite many marginalised and disadvantaged people in our midst. Our economy does undergo rises and falls, but it remains strong. While the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 devastated many countries, it did not have such a catastrophic effect on Australia. Yet around 20 per cent of the world's poor live in countries near us – in East and South-East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>4</sup>

In our region, Australia is the rich man and Lazarus is at our gate.

We, the Catholic bishops of Australia, are calling on the Christian community and all Australians – especially our leaders – to focus on our obligation to help and accompany our

neighbours. We are at a crucial point in the battle against world poverty. This is the moment to hear the call of Jesus.

## **A CRITICAL MOMENT**

As we reflect on this call, it is important to understand why we as Australia's Catholic bishops issue this Statement now.

In 2000, the world leaders of 189 nations, including Australia, gathered together and committed themselves to tackling global poverty. The ensuing Declaration consisted of eight *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015.

As we approach 2015, Australians will be called to put the children, women and men living in poverty at the forefront of our decision-making. This call comes first from those living in poverty. Their dignity demands that we respond to their cry. Secondly, the call arises from the international community's efforts since the year 2000 to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

As Pope Benedict XVI commented in 2006:

*People from different religions and cultures throughout the world are convinced that achieving the goal of eradicating extreme poverty by the year 2015 is one of the most important tasks in today's world. Moreover, they hold that such an objective is indissolubly linked to world peace and security.<sup>5</sup>*

### **The Millennium Development Goals<sup>6</sup>**

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

It is no secret that many of the MDGs will not be fully realised by 2015. Some targets have been achieved and there has been enormous progress in relation to others. These successes prove that international action can transform the lives of millions of people. The world's task now is to map out a course beyond 2015.

## Social Justice Statement 2013–2014

For Catholics, this period is significant for other reasons. In 2013 we mark the 50th anniversary of the great Encyclical of Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* ('Peace on Earth'), which affirmed the dignity of every human person and

*... the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services.*<sup>7</sup>

The year 2013 also marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which did so much to focus the Church's consciousness on the outside world and the call of the Gospel to work for justice in order to bring about the Kingdom of God.

And in 2014, the Catholic Church in Australia celebrates 50 years of the work of Caritas Australia. That celebration is about our outreach to the world's poor and educating Australians about the Gospel demand to act for justice. The work of Caritas, along with other agencies like Catholic Mission, Catholic Social Services Australia and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, is inspired and nourished by our traditions of Catholic social teaching and, most importantly, by the millions of people who, through their need, invite Australians to be part of the change to end poverty.

It is important to remember the level of poverty that the poorest of the earth experience. It has been said that if you have food in a fridge, clothes in a closet, a bed to sleep in and a roof over your head, you are richer than 75 per cent of the world's population. This is the degree of poverty that made Pope John Paul II ask at the turn of the millennium:

*How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads? ... Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning His voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty.*<sup>8</sup>

### **Flabiana's story**

In the conflict that followed Timor-Leste's declaration of independence in 1999, Flabiana and her family lost everything. Fleeing the violence that engulfed their village and killed a third of the country's population, they spent three months hiding in Timor-Leste's rugged mountains.

When it was safe to return, the family faced a scene of destruction. 'All our things were destroyed or stolen. We didn't have enough food for the whole year.'

But Caritas Australia offered a program to empower the community and train people in managing fast-growing crops, processing food, breeding animals, and in group savings and loans.

Flabiana's group developed a plan to produce nutritious tofu and tempeh and with a \$500 grant purchased a soybean processor. The group now makes and sells these and other foods for profit, and trains other groups to do the same.

Since 2007, life has changed dramatically in Flabiana's community. Her family have saved enough money to expand their kiosk, repair their house and buy livestock to breed. Her family have been able to reclaim their human dignity and build a brighter future for themselves.

Across Timor-Leste, communities like Flabiana's are working together towards full self-reliance. 'Living in peace we can do everything for our future, we can send our children to school, we can do our work well.'

Flabiana's story seems in some ways humble and unspectacular, but it has many lessons for us. Her life, always difficult and insecure, was thrown into chaos by violence and terror – like the violence that blights the lives of millions every day in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

As a woman in a developing nation, she faced the responsibility of feeding and caring for a family and was particularly vulnerable to precarious circumstances. The change in her life and her family's was not brought about by chance but by hard work and careful thought. She was offered hope by a program developed in the light of Catholic social teaching and practice. The amount of money required was small by the standards of most Australians.

In one of his first addresses after being elected, our new Pope spoke of our shared Gospel commitment to the poor of the world. He described how he chose his name:

*Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation ... He is the man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!*<sup>9</sup>

In clear and simple terms Pope Francis reminds us of how, in a spirit of peace, we cannot forget our brothers and sisters who are poor. The ones we are challenged to see and love are the people who are not allowed inside the gates of the world's decision-makers, the ones who do not sit at the table of affluence. These are the men, women and children living in poverty around the world.

## THE FACES OF POVERTY

*The struggle against destitution ... is not enough. It is a question, rather, of building a world where every person ... can live a fully human life ... and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man.*<sup>10</sup>

Pope Paul VI

## Social Justice Statement 2013–2014

As Christians we are called to proclaim the Good News, and attack the root causes of injustice and inequality in our world. We can judge the ethical and moral quality of a society by the way it treats its most vulnerable members.

Since the world's nations undertook to work towards the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, the proportion of those who live in extreme poverty has been halved. In 1990, 47 per cent of humanity lived in extreme poverty – the equivalent of less than \$1.25 per day. By 2008, the proportion had fallen to 24 per cent, and according to preliminary estimates, it was less than half the 1990 rate by 2010.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 14,000 lives per day have been saved by aid and development initiatives during this time.<sup>12</sup>

As we celebrate the successes achieved in recent decades in addressing world poverty, we also ask ourselves: *Who is being left behind? Who are the poorest of the poor?* Our faith calls us to look more closely at who is disproportionately affected by poverty, and to challenge ourselves and global leaders to bring about change with and for the poorest.

Poverty is more than simply a lack of money. It is multi-dimensional: it concerns access to health, education, social services, human rights, freedom, life opportunities and the ultimate goal of the development enterprise – happiness. The reality is that the most disadvantaged in the world suffer deprivation in many different ways. The hungry, those affected by disasters and conflict, those living with disabilities or HIV and AIDS, those on the move, and Indigenous populations, are some of these faces of the poorest of the poor.

Around 20 per cent of the world's poor live at Australia's gate. Although this region has seen rapid economic growth and a significant decline in poverty, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. In Indonesia, China and India, for example, despite strong growth, there are still millions experiencing extreme poverty and marginalisation.

Progress in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and western Asia has been slow and in some cases has actually reversed. In 1990 only one-sixth of the world's poor lived in Africa: currently over half do, and this is expected to reach five-sixths by 2025. By that time, up to two-thirds of the world's poor are likely to be concentrated in just 11 countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda, Madagascar, Kenya, Niger, Malawi, Sudan and South Sudan. Despite this, Africa currently receives just one-third of official development assistance.<sup>13</sup>

Armed conflict and violence are the cause of untold misery and destitution, as Flabiana's story shows. In 2011, more than four million people were uprooted from their homes and deprived of their livelihoods.<sup>14</sup> In poor nations that are free of conflict and other major disturbances, the number of people in poverty has fallen from about two billion in 1990 to 500 million in 2012. This number is expected to drop to 200 million by 2025. By comparison, where political and social stability is weak, the number of poor and marginalised people has remained around 500 million since 1990, and is not expected to change significantly by 2025.<sup>15</sup>

Members of minority groups, in particular, can find themselves confronting poverty, and the discrimination they face may drive inequality even further. This is the case in Australia and around the world. Global research estimates that two-thirds of the people in extreme poverty live in households where the head is from an ethnic minority.<sup>16</sup>

People in developing countries – and some within rich nations like Australia – are plagued by low incomes and limited access to basic services such as health, education, housing, water and sanitation. They confront food insecurity, natural disasters, and often war, violence or weak law and order.

In the following pages, we look at some groups that are particularly vulnerable to poverty.

### **The hungry of the world**

Haman Abdou is a Nigerian farmer who was able to obtain seeds from a Caritas-supported seed fair.

*'The last harvest was very poor. With erratic rainfall and locusts, I have produced almost nothing. I have struggled for months to find enough food for my family. It has been impossible to save seed for the next farming season ... the seed fair is a blessing for us.'*<sup>17</sup>

The world produces enough food to feed every child, woman and man. And yet, 12 per cent of the global population, 870 million people, are undernourished. Of these, 852 million live in developing countries.<sup>18</sup>

At least three-quarters of the world's extremely poor live in rural areas.<sup>19</sup> Hunger remains widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Southern Asia. In eastern Asia incomes have risen over the past decade but there are no signs of improvement in nourishment.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most insidious effects of chronic hunger is the harm it does to growing children. Malnutrition in children is likely to result in stunted growth that can never be reversed. It significantly increases the likelihood of vulnerability to infection, premature death and conditions like heart disease, diabetes and kidney damage. Worldwide, an estimated 165 million children under five years of age are stunted, with particularly high rates in Africa and Asia.<sup>21</sup> And while there is clear evidence of the consequences of poor nutrition on children, nutritional health often remains a low priority for aid and policy makers, at national and international levels.<sup>22</sup>

Tackling hunger and malnutrition is about more than just supplying enough food and increasing incomes. The structures that inhibit people from building their own food security must also be challenged.

## Social Justice Statement 2013–2014

In the developing world, 500 million smallholder and family farms produce 80 per cent of the food consumed.<sup>23</sup> Yet often these farmers find themselves forced to grow produce for export markets and are no longer producing enough food for their families and local consumption. Many of the world's least developed countries have gone from being agricultural net exporters to huge net importers. Rising agricultural productivity can also put strains on natural resources such as land, seeds and water. Many communities are under pressure as fisheries and pastures are depleted and contaminated due to agricultural practices, and competition for resources becomes fiercer.

Another serious issue is the wild fluctuation in food prices. The world's poor spend on average 70 per cent of their daily income on food – and the cost of food rose by more than 40 per cent between 2007 and 2011.<sup>24</sup> There are several reasons for this: poor harvests caused by extreme weather; poorly regulated and speculative market practices; rising costs of fuel and transportation; and the increasing demand for biofuels, which often use food crops such as maize.

These complexities have made achieving the first MDG – eradicating poverty and hunger – very challenging. Nevertheless we are inspired and driven to do more by some of the heroic efforts of farmers battling against the odds in poorer countries.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

*To face this crisis, peacemakers are called to work together in a spirit of solidarity, from the local to the international level, with the aim of enabling farmers, especially in small rural holdings, to carry out their activity in a dignified and sustainable way from the social, environmental and economic points of view.*<sup>25</sup>

As a nation, Australia should ensure that its agricultural trade policies are formulated on the basis of the 'right to food'. Trade agreements that we make with other countries must be focused on the needs of the poorest and ensure that small farmers are able to obtain fair prices for what they produce. Access to land and land tenure, fair market structures, information on market prices, equitable savings and lending services, and agricultural and crop storage techniques are among the critical underlying issues faced by farmers in poorer areas of the world.

### Disaster-affected communities

*The long term impacts of [natural] disasters are difficult because although they have become quite common in recent times, planning for the future is very difficult and it takes some time for communities to get back on their feet.*

Kath Rosic (Caritas Australia Southeast Asia Group Leader)<sup>26</sup>

## Social Justice Statement 2013–2014

No-one can forget the images and reports following the tsunami that struck South Asia on Boxing Day in 2004. Between 200,000 and 300,000 people died in this single catastrophe. Entire towns and villages were obliterated; local economies were ruined; and local effects included loss of farmlands and fishing grounds and the contamination of water supplies by seawater. This disaster is only one of many recent events – devastating cyclones, floods and earthquakes.

Humanitarian emergencies are increasingly common and destructive and affect more people than ever before. Since 1975, the number of reported disasters has increased fourfold, and the number of people affected increased by over four and a half times.<sup>27</sup>

Between 2001 and 2010 an average of 384 disasters per year were registered. In 2011, the number of disasters registered was slightly below that average, but the human and economic impacts were massive. The 332 natural disasters of 2011 affected over 244 million victims, including over 30,000 deaths, and economic damage was the highest ever, estimated at \$366 billion.<sup>28</sup>

Developing countries are disproportionately affected by natural disasters. Research over the past decade reveals that on average, a disaster will claim the lives of 1052 people in the poorest countries compared with 23 people in the developed world.<sup>29</sup> This is likely to continue as the poor of the world are exposed to more weather-related disasters, and conflict and political and economic crises in fragile states continue to disrupt effective management of infrastructure and natural resources.

The good news is that it is not necessarily expensive to reduce risk and strengthen vulnerable communities' resilience to disasters such as earthquakes, droughts or floods, particularly in comparison to the cost of reconstruction. Those most affected are able to take charge, reduce their own vulnerabilities, and often rebuild homes and communities to better standards. The Catholic Church, through its international development agencies, plays a transformational role in building community capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters.

The generous response of Australians to those caught in catastrophes such as the 2004 tsunami is to be commended. Natural disasters of flood and fire in our own recent history have made us very aware of the need to prepare for disasters and to empower local communities to be able to cope in times of crisis. This need is even more pressing in vulnerable communities that lack the infrastructure and services to respond to disasters. We urge that there be support for initiatives at the community level that focus on risk reduction, mitigation and preparedness for disasters as opposed to predominantly funding responses only after lives are lost and livelihoods destroyed.

## Indigenous peoples

*Do you know that when I was born, in some missions it was reported that 200 in 1000 of our babies were dying before they even reached the tender age of one? That is in my lifetime ... [E]ven today we are still dying decades younger than we need to; and our infants continue to die in our arms at three times the rate of other Australian infants.*

Tom Calma, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner<sup>30</sup>

There are approximately 370 million Indigenous peoples worldwide. Together they make up around five per cent of the world's population, yet they constitute up to 15 per cent of the world's poor and make up 300 million of the world's extremely poor rural population.<sup>31</sup>

Indigenous peoples face far greater health, welfare, educational and social challenges than non-Indigenous people do. They are over-represented among the world's poor and among those facing oppression and social, political and economic exclusion. Cultural, geographical and language-based discrimination deprive them of education, basic human services, skills training and employment opportunities. Worldwide, Indigenous peoples fare worse than the majority populations around them, particularly with regard to health, child mortality rates and education.<sup>32</sup>

We can see this pattern in Australia too. Despite our high standard of living, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in poverty, and they experience systematic neglect and denial of their rights to land, cultural identity, self-determination and resources. Indigenous Australian males have a life expectancy 11.5 years lower than other Australians and Indigenous females 9.7 years lower. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffer from higher rates of heart disease, diabetes and respiratory disease than the rest of the population.<sup>33</sup> Indigenous children aged under five years are twice as likely to die during infancy compared with the rest of the Australian population.<sup>34</sup> Indigenous people are severely over-represented in Australia's prison systems: in 2012, there were 1914 adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners per 100,000 Indigenous adults, compared with 129 per 100,000 non-Indigenous adults.<sup>35</sup>

This face of inequality and poverty, so prevalent around the world and here at home, is often related to a history of dispossession and the loss of self-determination in the life of families and communities. And while this history demands a reconciliation that will heal the wounds suffered over generations, there remains an urgency to address the needs of our brothers and sisters. As Pope John Paul II said during his historic visit to Alice Springs in 1986:

*... what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off till tomorrow.*<sup>36</sup>

An international development plan beyond 2015 will need to increase commitment to reducing extreme poverty and injustice for Indigenous peoples around the world. The Australian Government should ensure that justice for Indigenous peoples is a priority in our

overseas aid policy and in our own country, in accordance with the principles and recommendations of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Central to the Declaration, which Australia endorsed in 2009, is a commitment to work in genuine partnership with Indigenous peoples and ensure their fully informed consent before introducing policies and programs affecting their communities.

## People with disabilities

Samphors is a 17-year-old Cambodian who is deaf. She says:

*'I did not understand what people around me were doing. I went to the rice field and worked with my mother, and was responsible for all kinds of housework like cooking and laundry; I couldn't understand what people were saying.'*<sup>37</sup>

Like almost all deaf people in Cambodia, Samphors had never attended school and was entirely dependent on her family before she came to the Maryknoll Cambodia Deaf Development Programme (DDP). There she learnt how to read, write, sew and use sign language.

In developing countries, 90 per cent of children living with disabilities do not go to school. As few as one per cent of disabled adults in such societies can read and write.<sup>38</sup>

Disabilities are both a cause and consequence of poverty. People living with a disability make up around 15 per cent of the world's population and about 20 per cent of the very poorest in the world.<sup>39</sup> In both developed and developing societies, disabled people experience stigma, prejudice and discrimination.

Disabled people also have far less access to employment and to suitable housing. In developing countries, it is harder for people with disabilities to have access to essentials such as clean water, and they experience greater vulnerability to gender discrimination, economic and social exclusion, conflict and violence. Persons with disability are known to have poorer health outcomes, lower educational access and higher rates of poverty, resulting from the difficulties they experience in accessing basic services and in securing employment.

Worldwide, 150 million children live with a disability and subsequently face reduced access to schools, health care, recreation and opportunities for work. One out of every three children not attending primary school has a disability and disabled women and girls are three times more likely to face discrimination than disabled men.<sup>40</sup>

In developing communities around the globe, some models of success are emerging that we can learn from. These build capacity for parents and teachers to include children with disabilities in school, improve access to basic services, and strengthen policy at the national level. Each in its own way is responding to Jesus' call to invite those with a disability to the table.

In the Gospels, Jesus seeks out disabled people and responds to their cry – giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf or helping the crippled to walk. In Luke’s Gospel he tells a man who had invited him to dinner: ‘... when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind ...’ (Luke 14:13).

The needs of people with disabilities remind us of the respect that must be accorded to the most vulnerable. The ministry we share with Christ reminds us of the sacredness of life from conception until death and the innate human dignity of each person throughout their life. In every person we see the image of God before us, no matter how great their need or challenging their circumstances.

We urge the Australian government to use its international standing and take a leadership role among international development donors to make the needs of disabled people a core part of its strategies for ending poverty.

### People on the move: the displaced

Zarfeh Shibleyh and eight of her children fled Syria for Jordan with only the clothes on their backs. She said:

*We had to get the children out because it had become too dangerous ... I brought nothing of value, except my children. There is nothing more precious than that.*

Her husband and two other sons remain in Syria, their whereabouts unknown.<sup>41</sup>

By the end of 2012, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide exceeded 45 million, the highest level of displacement since 1994. These are men, women and children driven from their homes by war or civil violence.

Often these people are forced to seek refuge in countries that are themselves facing significant struggles. Eighty per cent of refugees are seeking protection in developing countries, making it even harder for those nations to lift themselves out of poverty. In 2012, Pakistan hosted the largest number of refugees (1.6 million), followed by Iran (868,000). Syria hosted 477,000 refugees and, with the recent terrible violence, 647,000 have fled seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.<sup>42</sup>

For millions of refugees, it will be many years before they can find a home again. Some never do. Of the refugee population under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, around two-thirds – 6.4 million people – had been in these circumstances for five years or longer. Refugee camps can be the size of small cities: the one in Dadaab, Kenya, is home to about half a million people, including some 10,000 third-generation refugees born in the camp.<sup>43</sup>

Not only have these people lost access to their livelihoods, their extended families and their faith communities, but they are very often prevented from moving around freely, earning a living wage or planning for their futures. Those displaced from their homes are prone to disease and trauma, causing them to experience poverty at many different levels, no matter how high their education or employment levels before.

Facing these odds, it is no wonder that many are forced into desperate choices – living hand-to-mouth in slums or shanty towns, or spending their last savings on risky journeys to places they hope can protect them.

The Catholic Church has been a source of hope and assistance to those on the move around the globe.

That basic level of human solidarity – hospitality to the stranger and refuge for those seeking protection – has been lacking in our national political debate over the past decade. The recent increase in the number of people arriving by boat is insignificant by world standards. In 2012, as a country like Pakistan struggled to accommodate 1.6 million refugees, Australia’s political leaders and media whipped up hysteria over the arrival of 17,000 asylum seekers in Australian waters.<sup>44</sup>

We have been saddened to see part of our international aid budget diverted to funding for asylum seekers being processed in our community. These are men and women who richly deserve our support, but not at the expense of others in desperate need. Any reduction or diversion of international aid funds remains a concern, particularly where those funds are directed at addressing many of the problems that cause people to flee their homelands.

## **LAZARUS AT OUR GATE**

It is in the stories of men and women like Flabiana, who helped rebuild her community in Timor-Leste, that we find an opportunity for the Australian community to be truly compassionate. Stories have always opened us up and moved us to action – and love is the action that brings the change required to overcome degrading poverty.

Three years ago Pope Benedict challenged the world, in its response to the financial crisis, to put the focus on those living in poverty:

*Where human lives are concerned, time is always short: yet the world has witnessed the vast resources that governments can draw upon to rescue financial institutions deemed ‘too big to fail’. Surely the integral human development of the world’s peoples is no less important: here is an enterprise, worthy of the world’s attention, that is truly ‘too big to fail’.*<sup>45</sup>

## Social Justice Statement 2013–2014

The depth and breadth of poverty that still exists in our world calls us to action. That so many suffer multiple burdens of deprivation prompts deep soul searching. How is it that so many are excluded from enjoying spiritual, cultural, educational, social, economic and political freedoms? How is it that so many still lie like Lazarus at our gate, bearing in their bodies the cost of their struggle and denied access to the table of participation and solidarity time and again? This is the challenge for us, as Australians and as members of the global community, as we seek the path to reducing and eliminating poverty in the years to come.

In the Gospel parable, the rich man's failure is not an overt cruelty, but an indifference to human suffering. The rich man passes Lazarus constantly but never actually 'sees' him – never actually recognising Lazarus' need.

We cannot be at peace, eating our fill, in the knowledge that a sister or brother lies hungry or sick at our gate. We know that such a state of affairs is as far as it can be from the vision of God. Our God is revealed as a God of abundance and hospitality who gives life to the world, bread to the hungry, and Christ as our guide and saviour. God in Jesus chooses humility, service and self-emptying as the hallmarks of a love which is everlasting, sumptuous and rich.

The gift that Jesus leaves us is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the sacramental bond that forms us as Christians and is essential to our communion with one another and with God. It satisfies our spiritual hunger but reminds us of the bounty of God's table. When we think of the continuing injustice in the world, we are chastened by the words of Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ:

*If there is hunger anywhere in the world, then our celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete everywhere in the world ... In the Eucharist we receive Christ hungering in the world. He comes to us, not alone, but with the poor, the oppressed, the starving of the earth. Through him they are looking to us for help, for justice, for love expressed in action. Therefore we cannot properly receive the Bread of life unless at the same time we give the bread of life to those in need wherever and whoever they may be.<sup>46</sup>*

Greed and indifference divide the world. The chasms fixed between rich and poor were made by us and we can unmake them.

When we see these people – the marginalised, the hungry and those in flight from violence or disaster – we cannot avoid the question: *Why does this poverty still exist?* What are the structures that perpetuate it? Can we really say that so many are hungry or dying from preventable disease simply through bad luck?

In his Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict spoke of a world in which there is a 'scandal of glaring inequalities' between rich and poor. 'Corruption and illegality are unfortunately evident in the conduct of the economic and political class in rich countries,

both old and new, as well as in poor ones'. He said that 'malfunction and dramatic problems' in the economic system must be addressed.<sup>47</sup>

As Christians we are committed not only to work for the full realisation of human dignity for all people everywhere, but to seek out and remedy the root causes of poverty and injustice. We are called to open the door to the banquet hosted by Jesus where all sit together and feast as brothers and sisters. The poor cannot wait. Nor can we hold back: the parable of Lazarus and the rich man speaks to each one of us.

The next task that confronts us all as Catholics is to ask what we can do to bring about the justice that we are called to. How can we bring about a conversion in our own souls, in our community, and in our nation?

### **What can I do?**

Flabiana's story at the beginning of this Statement showed us how much can be achieved with our donations. Organisations such as Caritas Australia, devoted to alleviating world poverty, can bring about enormous changes in marginalised communities and are a powerful means of working for justice worldwide. Consider how much you can commit to such organisations.

We cannot ignore the need to foster growth in our own souls – the habit of heart that looks and sees who stands outside. Prayer and reflection are not only ways to develop our religious life as individuals; they are ways in which we can look beyond ourselves and put our 'wants' and 'needs' into perspective.

Some of the groups of disadvantaged and marginalised people we discussed earlier are represented here in Australia. They are part of a worldwide pattern of marginalisation and injustice. Australia's Indigenous people and the comparatively small numbers of refugees seeking protection here are some examples. As part of our personal conversion, we can ask ourselves what we are doing to recognise those individuals in our own communities, get to know them, understand their needs and work for justice in our own region.

### **What can my community do?**

Fifty years ago Pope John XXIII wrote:

*All people are united by their common origin and fellowship, their redemption by Christ, and their supernatural destiny.*<sup>48</sup>

We cannot work to change the world by ourselves. We need to work in unity with those around us – and those far from us.

## Social Justice Statement 2013–2014

There is a rich variety of Church organisations that work to help the disadvantaged and marginalised here and overseas. There are a number of examples of parish social justice groups that have reached out to communities in our region – for example in Timor-Leste – and funded and cooperated in building infrastructure and employment opportunities in local communities. Organisations such as Jesuit Refugee Service work to help refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, in Australian detention centres in other countries, and those seeking protection overseas.

We can take local action through our St Vincent de Paul societies or by volunteering in services auspiced by various parishes, religious orders and other groups in our society. Unrivalled work is being done for disabled people through L'Arche communities here and overseas.

### **What can Australia do?**

Australia has assumed some important responsibilities. As a nation elected onto the United Nations Security Council, we have a direct hand dealing with global security challenges and humanitarian crises. As host of the 2014 Group of Twenty (G-20) economic summit in Brisbane, we have an opportunity to promote the responsibility of the world's leading economies towards the world's poor.

We, the Catholic bishops of Australia, call on our government to exercise these responsibilities not merely in our country's narrow interests, but in the spirit of the common good of all humanity. Australia cannot claim these roles in world leadership if it has not shown that we are willing to act in the interests of the poorest and most marginalised within our shores, in our region and worldwide.

The consistent calls for justice for members of our own First Nations and for people who come to our shores seeking protection from violence and danger are two immediate challenges Australia must meet.

We must also ask ourselves if we are generous enough in our global efforts. According to the UN Millennium Project, '0.7% of rich world GNI [Gross National Income] can provide enough resources to meet Millennium Development Goals'.<sup>49</sup> In 1967, and again in 2002, Australia joined with other developed nations in pledging to commit 0.7 per cent of its GNI to overseas aid. It has never achieved that goal. We believe that a rich country like Australia, whose economy is healthy by comparison with most others in the world, should show the leadership it lays claim to by making a generous commitment to an aid budget after 2015, and keeping its promise by living up to that commitment.

## TO BE WELCOMED AND EMBRACED

Prompted and inspired by the Holy Spirit, we seek with Christ to bridge the chasms between rich and poor. Like the chasm that separated the rich man and Lazarus in the parable Jesus told (Luke 16:26), the sin of global poverty leaves many members of our human family weak and estranged, outside the gates of warmth, hospitality and love. When we reach out from our place of comfort and open our gates, we open the way to a new solidarity as human beings. This solidarity reconciles our differences and enables us to participate in our real life which is in God and of God's fashioning.

Pope Francis has renewed the call to address global poverty when meeting with diplomats of countries around the world:

*How many poor people there still are in the world! And what great suffering they have to endure! ...*

*My wish is that the dialogue between us should help build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not any enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced! ...*

*Fighting poverty, both material and spiritual, building peace and constructing bridges: these, as it were, are the reference points for a journey that I want to invite each of the countries here present to take up.<sup>50</sup>*

The Christian tradition of working to persuade others to strive for the common good and the participation of all, particularly the ones least equipped to do so, leads us, the Catholic bishops of Australia, to call on our fellow Australians to be in solidarity in this critical moment in the fight against world poverty. As Australians – individuals, communities and a nation – let us strive to bridge the chasm of inequity, injustice and conflict in our world.

That is the goal that we work towards, one that we pray for God's help to bring about.

God is waiting for us in the lives of our poorest brothers and sisters.

Who is at our gate?

### Notes

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- <sup>19</sup> Melamed (2012), p. 7.
- <sup>20</sup> United Nations (2012), p. 12.
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