



Edmund Rice Centre
Awareness. Advocacy. Action

ERC JUSTICE UPDATES

October 2020 No.34

Dear All,

Welcome to the 34th Edition of ERC Justice Updates your regular newsletter from the Edmund Rice Centre, on all sorts of matters relating to human rights, first nations and environmental justice.

As we near the end of this turbulent year and wonder what is yet to come - think of those who have nothing to look forward to and have lost all hope. Let us reflect on Desmond Tutu's words:

Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary promise that every human life is of inestimable value. Desmond Tutu

In this time of great upheaval & change Justice Updates will be coming to you every fortnight - please send us anything you would like included. Your suggestions, comments both positive and negative or indeed any information you think would be good to include, it is all much appreciated.

Don't forget to forward Justice Updates onto anyone or let me know their email address and I will subscribe them.

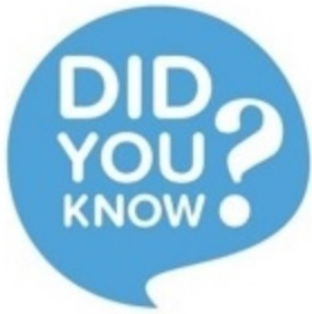
Previous editions are available at <https://www.erc.org.au/newsletters>

Peace

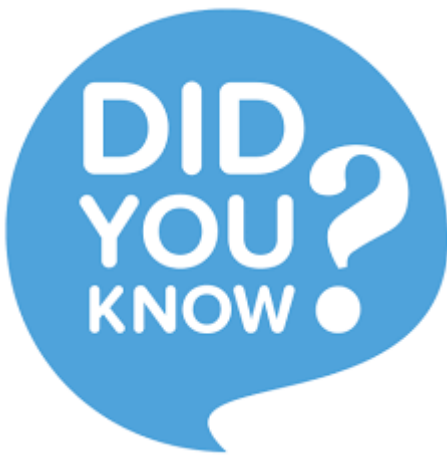
Marita

Communications Project Officer,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that there are articles in this publication with names and images of deceased people.



On Friday 30th October 2020, the Australian Government will have detained men & women on Nauru & Manus Island/Port Moresby for 2632 days.



The Climate of the Nation 2020 Benchmark Report was released on 28th October. This annual report by The Australia Institute has tracked Australian attitudes on climate change for over a decade, since 2007. The report finds:

- After the devastating Black Summer bushfires, eight in ten Australians (82%) are concerned that climate change will result in more bushfires, up from 76% in 2019.
- Vast majority of Australians (83%) want coal-fired power stations to be phased out.
- Only 12% of Australians prefer investment in gas to power Australia's economic recovery, while the majority of Australians (59%) prefer investment in renewables as a pathway for economic recovery.
- Australians overestimate gas industry employment by a factor of 40x, believing, on average, that 8.2% of the workforce is in fossil gas mining when the reality is it represents just 0.2% of the Australian workforce.
- Seven in ten Australians (71%) want Australia to be a global leader in finding solutions to climate change, a jump of 9 percentage points

from 2019.

- **More than two in three Australians (68%) believe Australia should have a national target for net-zero emissions by 2050, including majority support across Coalition voters (59%, Labor voters (81%), Greens voters (90%), Other voters (65%).**



'There are conflicting agendas here, one where the government is supporting the progression of the treaty and the other where they're comfortable in proceeding with the irreversible destruction of significant cultural heritage.' Photograph: Sean Paris

The destruction of a sacred tree on Djab Wurrung country has broken our hearts

Sissy Eileen Austin, The Guardian, 27th October 2020

The sounds of chainsaws will haunt us forever. It adds to the intergenerational trauma shadowing our people

On Monday our biggest nightmare became a cold hard reality. The sounds of chainsaws, excessive police force, the crying of children. We felt defeated as an element of our culturally significant landscape was torn away, taken, gone forever. We are the last generation to ever be in the powerful presence of our directions tree on Djab Wurrung country.

Meriki Onus: "I'm really saddened to see the directions tree chopped down. I feel like [Victoria](#) are dancing on our graves with doughnuts and whisky."

It has been 862 days since the establishment of the Djab Wurrung heritage protection embassy to protect sacred women's country from the Victorian

government's Western Highway duplication project in the state's western district.

Country is who we are, country is what guides us and what grounds us in all that we do as First Nations people. This particular 12km stretch, where the expansion of a road between Melbourne and Adelaide is planned, holds a deep intimate connection for Djab Wurrung women, with birthing trees that are more than 800 years old. Thousands of generations of Djab Wurrung babies have been born in this country.

Over the last two years Djab Wurrung people have risen to protect these trees. Our determination to rise has been fuelled by the deep power our country holds. That power is one that guards our spirit and our soul when coming up against the coloniser.

We are seeing right now the weakness of the Traditional Owner Settlement Act and other associated legislations and incorporated organisations that are creating tidal waves of pain and loss for our people.

Aunty Donna Wright: "When Aboriginal corporations are complicit in the desecration and destruction of sacred sites they need to be held accountable. How can we treaty with a government that destroys our sacred sites?"

Every single person has played a role in getting us to where we are now, giving their blood, sweat and tears. The hours spent in mediation and courts, begging with tears rolling down our faces for an understanding, bodies on the frontline on the hottest days and the coldest nights.

There is this indescribable feeling that comes with attempting to seek justice and empathy from the very same system that was built to destroy. Destroy it did, and destroying it continues to do.

Read More:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/27/the-destruction-of-a-sacred-tree-on-djab-wurrung-country-has-broken-our-hearts>



Pace e Bene Non-violence Daily Inspiration

Friday October 23, 2020

"If I take your race away, and there you are, all strung out. And all you got is your little self, and what is that? What are you without racism? Are you any good? Are you still strong? Are you still smart? Do you still like yourself? I mean, these are the questions. Part of it is, 'yes, the victim. How terrible it's been for black people.' I'm not a victim. I refuse to be one . . . if you can only be tall because somebody is on their knees, then you have a serious problem. And my feeling is that white people have a very, very serious problem, and they should start thinking about what they can do about it. Take me out of it."

—Toni Morrison

War on refugees moves to final phase onshore

Mike Secombe, The Saturday Paper, October 17-23, 2020

Without warning, the government has removed all support from hundreds of refugees in community detention – denying them housing and income support.

The first sign something had shifted came in late August, when letters began arriving from the Department of Home Affairs. Written entirely in English, they were addressed to refugees who had been brought to Australia for medical treatment and then remained in the community. The letters announced that these people would be shifted to a different visa class. They would be given work rights for the first time, but beyond that would lose all government support. They would be evicted from their housing and their income supplements ended. They will, however, gain access to Medicare. At the same time, this group loses specific funding for complex health needs and the income support - 60 per cent of the relevant Centrelink payment - that would allow them to more readily access appointments. The letters said these changes would come into effect in three weeks.

"We knew, or suspected, that there would be more, and we were trying to do as much as we could to prepare..." says Kate Leaney, campaigns and communications manager at Welcoming Australia. "We were never sure of how many there would be, and we didn't know what the timing would be.

The government moved quickly. Throughout September, the letters kept arriving. so far, more than 500 men, women and children have been placed onto final departure bridging E visas and told to leave Australia. When COVID-19 restrictions ease in Victoria, about 160 more people will be added to the list.

" It is just devastating,"says Leaney, " and it feels very intentional."

The vast Majority of these people have been assessed as refugees. They represent some of the most vulnerable and acutely unwell people in Australia.

Physically they suffer from malnutrition, untreated dental infections, cancer, stroke, debilitating autoimmune conditions and a litany of other infections or chronic health conditions. Some also endure severe psychological breakdowns caused by indefinite detention, which manifest as psychosomatic disorders, suicidal ideation and dissociation. For most, the treatment is complex and ongoing.

Since 2017, the Coalition has been slowly moving through the population of refugees and asylum seekers living in Australia without long-term residency rights and shifting them onto final departure visas.

Read More: <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2020/10/17/exclusive-war-refugees-moves-final-phase-onshore/160285320010560>



A group of detained asylum seekers are seen during a protest outside the Kangaroo Point Central Hotel in Brisbane in August.

A Somali man has been transferred from the hotel after an act of self harm. He has been unable to see his wife and child since Covid-19 restrictions were imposed in March. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

Refugee advocates concerned for detainee held in Brisbane hotel for 16 months

Calla Wahlquist, The Guardian, 25th October 2020

Man transferred under Medevac to rejoin family has not been allowed to have them visit during pandemic and is now on suicide watch

Refugee advocates have raised concerns about the welfare of a 37-year-old man who is under suicide watch at the [Brisbane](#) Immigration Transit Accommodation after attempting self harm.

The man, from Somalia, had been detained in a hotel at Kangaroo Point in Brisbane since being transferred to Australia from Nauru under now-defunct Medevac laws in June last year.

He was approved for transfer under clauses allowing people to reunite with family members in Australia for medical treatment. His wife and infant son were transferred to Australia in 2017 because his son was having trouble breathing.

They now live just 20 minutes from the motel where he has been detained for 16 months. But the family has not been reunited, and since coronavirus restrictions were introduced in March they have been unable to visit.

“The only time he has seen his wife and son is when his wife brings his son to the fence,” Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said. “That’s the only time he has seen them since March.”

Read More:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/oct/25/refugee-advocates-concerned-for-detainee-held-in-brisbane-hotel-for-16-months>



BRAND NEW PUBLICATION FROM EDMUND RICE CENTRE
JUST COMMENT *by Fr. Claude Mostowik msc*

Universal Basic Income - Building a Better Future

It would seem that most people would prefer a society based on care rather than profit and yearn for work that serves their higher needs. We need to acknowledge that a hunger for respect, love, generosity and a sense of higher purpose to their lives is something many theories overlook.

COVID-19 has revealed society's failure to address the needs of many people. The global market's vulnerability has been exposed with threats to supply chains, and ruthless competition that disregards its impact on people and the Earth.

Read full document:

https://www.erc.org.au/universal_basic_income_building_a_new_future

\$18,500 a year for all: a basic income would reduce inequality, says study
Matt Wade, The Age, 26th October 2020

A basic income for all adults of \$18,500 a year, tapering off as work-related earnings increase, would lift tens of thousands out of poverty and dramatically reduce inequality in Australia.

As employment and earnings are hit by COVID-19 disruptions, three academic experts have evaluated the costs of a payment that would go to most people of working age regardless of their employment status.

Their proposed Australian Basic Income is comparable to a universal basic income (UBI), a

policy option that has attracted growing international attention during the past decade. Rather than being paid to all adults, the Australian Basic Income would taper off as an individual's income rises. Those with an income of more than \$180,000 (the threshold at which the top marginal tax rate applies) would not receive any payment.

To fund the scheme, Australia's overall level of taxation would need to rise from around 28 per cent of gross domestic product to 34 per cent but that would still be in line with the average for the OECD, a club of mostly rich countries.

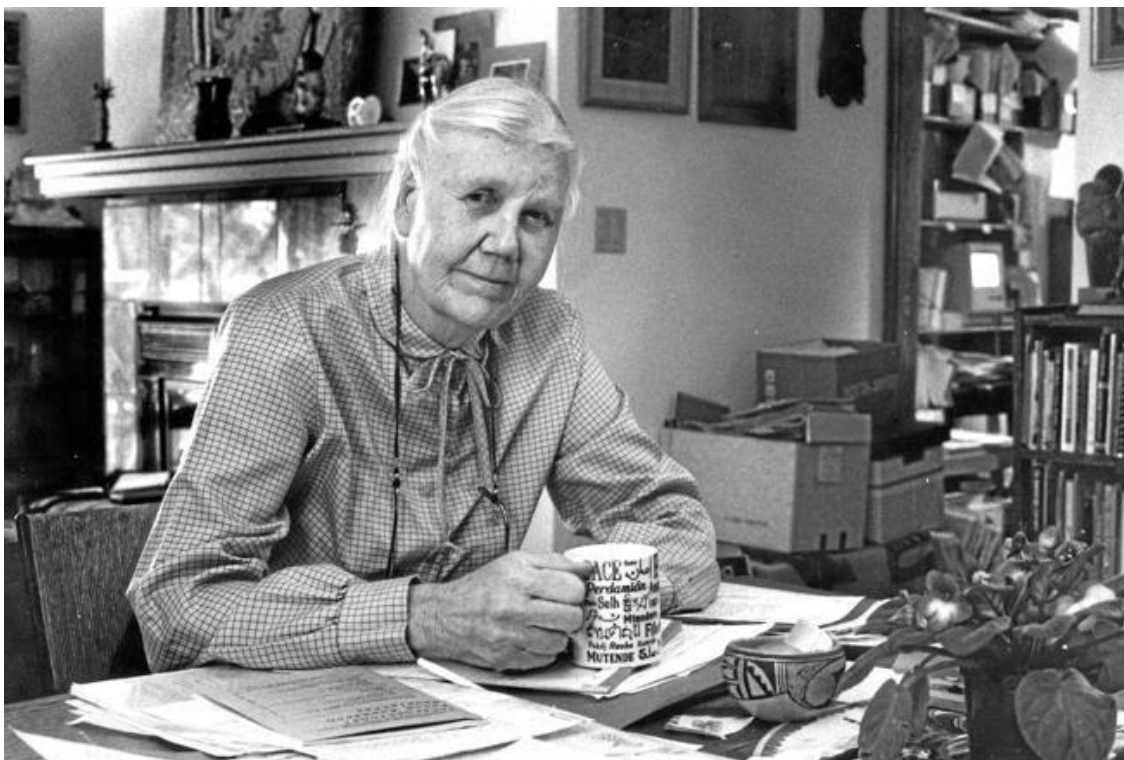
The [study](#), by Macquarie University's ***Ben Spies-Butcher**, Australian National University's Ben Phillips and University of Sydney's Troy Henderson evaluated the effects of a basic income payment of \$14,650 a year, which is equivalent to the JobSeeker payment before COVID-19, and a payment of \$18,500 per year. The lower payment would have an annual net cost of \$103 billion and the more generous option \$126 billion. Under the scheme, JobSeeker and Youth Allowance would not be required.

The modelling showed that the \$18,500 payment would reduce a key measure of national inequality, called the Gini Coefficient, by almost 20 per cent (from 0.339 to 0.274) signifying a much more equal distribution of income. The poverty rate would fall from 11 per cent to 9.1, meaning about half a million people would be lifted above the poverty line.

** Please note Ben-Spies Butcher is a former employee of the Edmund Rice Centre.*

Read more:

<https://www.theage.com.au/business/the-economy/18-500-a-year-for-all-a-basic-income-would-reduce-inequality-says-study-20201023-p567yr.html>



Sunday October 18, 2020

"When we are talking about a global vision of a disarmed world—a world without weapons—then we have to know what our brothers and sisters have been able to create in the way of nonviolent sharing communities under great hardships in many parts of the world. Practicality links with spirituality."
—Elise Boulding



The moment has arrived. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons just achieved its 50th ratification at a UN event in New York! That means it will enter into force in 90 days, on the 22nd of January 2021, making nuclear weapons illegal under international law for all time.

The Treaty now has 84 signatories and 50 states parties, thanks to the newest additions Nauru, Jamaica and Honduras. Australia, shamefully, is not one of them. Yet!

Help us shine the spotlight on our government by [adding your face to our virtual march](#).

Why is entry-into-force important?

- All countries that have ratified the treaty will be **bound by it**.
- It establishes clearly that nuclear weapons are **inhumane, unacceptable, and now illegal**, and that no state should possess, use or threaten to use them.
- It puts Australia **out of step with international law** on nuclear weapons.
- A ban treaty can **change the behaviour** of countries that haven't joined, as demonstrated by the bans on landmines and cluster munitions.
- More **financial institutions will divest** from companies that produce nuclear weapons, in line with policies to exclude weapons banned by international law.

- It creates **pressure and momentum** for more nuclear weapons abolition action!

What do we do now?

Celebrate! We've proven wrong all of the doubters who said it would be impossible to ban nuclear weapons. A global shift is underway, slowly but surely.

Next step: let's get Australia on board. It's time to end the fallacy of "extended nuclear deterrence". Far from protecting us, nuclear weapons threaten our very existence

We started this campaign in Melbourne in 2007 with hope and determination to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. Now we're a Nobel Peace Prize-winning coalition of people and organisations in 100 countries!

The imminent entry into force of the treaty changes things. Our government has no legitimacy on nuclear disarmament until it joins the ban

While the global picture is perilous, the ban treaty is a bright light of hope. Thank you for being part of this journey to a more peaceful future.



Mick Tsikas/AAP

We can no longer ignore the threats facing the Pacific — we need to support more migration to Australia

NB. This is a position the Edmund Rice Centre has been advocating to governments for many years.

Jane McAdam & Jonathon Pryke, The Conversation, 22nd October 2020

The effects of a warming planet are no longer far away in time or distance. We are witnessing transformed landscapes, mass extinctions and people on the move, whether by force or choice.

Across the globe, the adverse effects of disasters and climate change are already prompting millions of people to move. More people are now displaced within their countries each year by disasters than by conflict.

The Asia-Pacific region has been the hardest hit by these disasters.

In the Pacific islands, king tides, cyclones, droughts and flooding displace people on a regular basis. Countries like Kiribati and Tuvalu are now facing existential questions about their capacity to sustain their populations into the future.

‘Burying our heads in the sand’

There are potential consequences for Australia, too, which may disrupt many of our foreign and domestic policy agendas – including energy, environment, foreign aid, national security, labour and migration.

This is why Pacific governments, including Australia, are currently engaged in talks about how migration could alleviate pressure on threatened Pacific island nations and become a climate change adaptation strategy.

Most Pacific Islanders want to remain in their homes. Policies designed to reduce their exposure to disaster risks, improve their adaptation to climate change and bolster their development can all help.

But at the same time, Pacific communities acknowledge

that the movement of people needs to be discussed ... [and] failing to do so will be like burying our heads in the sand.

Most displacement in the Pacific is temporary and internal, but it is occurring with increasing regularity.

Some Pacific governments have already developed guidelines on internal

displacement and planned relocations in the context of climate change and disasters. Fiji has established a trust fund to support relocations. (New Zealand has contributed A\$3 million to the fund).

Read More:

https://theconversation.com/we-can-no-longer-ignore-the-threats-facing-the-pacific-we-need-to-support-more-migration-to-australia-148530?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20October%2023%202020%20-%201766217118&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20October%2023%202020%20-%201766217118+CID_650e2fe74e85a98458995c7f892bb0da&utm_source=campaign_monitor&utm_term=We%20can%20no%20longer%20ignore%20the%20threats%20facing%20the%20Pacific%20%20we%20need%20to%20support%20more%20migration%20to%20Australia

Indigenous communities hit hard by climate change

CathNews, 28th October 2020

A research report on environmental changes in Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific countries has found local indigenous communities are experiencing severe impacts as a result of a changing climate. Source: Caritas Australia.

Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand published the “Towards New Horizons” report, with contributions from Caritas agencies in Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Australia.

Towards New Horizons tracks the direct impact of five key issues on people in the region: coastal erosion/sea-level rise, access to food and water, extreme weather, offshore mining and drilling and climate finance.

Caritas Australia’s Bernard Holland said: “We need to pay attention to these environmental changes because they have disproportionate impacts on some of the most marginalised communities.”

“In this report, we learn about the impacts of environmental changes on communities like the Carteret Islanders, who have been forced to relocate to the mainland in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, in Papua New Guinea,” Mr Holland said.

“Hearing these stories is vital to understand how severe these environmental changes already are for some communities. This isn’t a distant problem, it’s something that’s happening right now.”

The report also looks at how a changing climate disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities, including First Australians communities.

Tom Powell provided mental health support during the Australian bushfires to local Indigenous communities through his organisation Red Dust Healing, supported by Caritas Australia.

The Red Dust Healing program focuses on empowering participants to be a part of their own solution by restoring family structures and reconnecting them to traditional ways of healing.

Read More:

[New report on changing climate in the Pacific region](#) (Caritas Australia)

REFLECTIONS



*To be great, be whole....
To be great, be whole: don't exaggerate
Or leave out any part of you.
Be complete in each thing. Put all you are
Into the least of your acts.
So too in each lake, with its lofty life,
The whole moon shines.
~ Fernando Pessoa*

Our hands

Clare Locke & Colleen Keating, Eureka Street, 18th March 2019

The church is an old man with heavy robes

Heavy lidded, head bowed

Stooped

We are twisting, clutching, writhing

Pointing fingers, fists stamping tables or shaking in fury

But the old man is deaf and blind and besides

His head is low

And he sits within a prison cell

In time (strange hope from here)

Our rage and bodies soften

And a bell is heard again

Our hands find the gentle reality of our own skin

Another's warm palm and a voice that says it's okay to mourn

This is compassion

The pain of being human

— Clare Locke

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the traditional owners and custodians of the land. We commit ourselves to actively work alongside them for reconciliation and justice. We pay our respects to the Elders; past, present and future. As we take our next step we remember the first footsteps taken on this sacred land.

Our mailing address is:

|HTML:LIST_ADDRESS_HTML| *|END:IF|*