

JUSTACT

NEWS & RESOURCES FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION UNIT

SEPTEMBER 2015



IN THIS EDITION

LETTER WRITING ACTIONS

- Stop digital currencies being used by online child sexual abuse businesses
- Protecting higher education from further privatisation

POSTCARDS

- Call for an end to human trafficking on to Australian farms and factories

COMMBANK RULES OUT FUNDING TO WRECK THE REEF

We have seen some great progress in the campaign to stop Australian banks funding Indian company Adani's development of a huge coal mine that would damage the Great Barrier Reef.

In early August, Adani lost the court case seeking environmental approval for the project. This was followed by the Commonwealth Bank stopping its involvement in the project as a financial adviser. Adani then cancelled its financial advice contract with the UK Standard Chartered bank, casting further doubt on the viability of the project. *The Age* (1/8) reported that Adani had sacked more than 100 workers (reducing the workforce to around 20) and suspended contracts

with engineering firms working on the project. This all points towards the project not proceeding.

India plans to phase out coal imports by 2021 and double its domestic coal production. It also plans to install 175 GW of renewable energy as well as upgrading its electricity grid, all of which will remove the need for coal imports. This makes the Adani coal mine in Queensland even less viable.

Eas Sarma, the former Secretary of the Indian Ministry of Power has publicly refuted claims by Prime Minister Tony Abbott that coal exports from the Adani mine in Queensland would benefit Indians currently without electricity. He said increases in electricity production from coal fired power-stations will simply feed increased consumption by wealthy

Indians. Most Indians who lack access to electricity live in rural villages where it is very expensive to connect to a central electricity grid. He says, "Australian coal, like any other coal, is not good for Indian people's health and it will not deliver electricity to those who are currently living in energy poverty. It's time for the Australian government and coal industry to realise that the era of Australian coal exports is coming to an end. What Indians need is affordable, locally-generated renewable energy, not coal".

Thanks to everyone who wrote to the Australian banks asking that they not fund the Adani coal mine and congratulations to Lyn Mulligan, from the Ocean Grove Uniting Church, who

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FINAL 2015 MAILING DATE: NOVEMBER 9

If you would like to spend a couple of hours in the company of socially minded people and help us compile and send off these mailings we'd love to hear from you! Contact **Robyn Hosking: 9251 5271**



Justice & International Mission

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

COMMBANK RULES OUT FUNDING TO WRECK THE REEF

From Page 1

had her letter against the coal mine published in *The Age* on 12 July.

The next step in this campaign is to keep the pressure up so that Prime Minister Abbott does not carry through his threat to change environmental protection laws. This would mean coal projects like the Adani mine could not be held up in court because of concerns about the environmental damage they will cause. •

CORPORATE POWER ON HOLD (FOR NOW)

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a trade deal that would pose an incredible threat to our democracy by allowing corporations to sue governments for making laws that impact on their profits.

In our July mailing we asked you to write to the Australian Government to oppose the deal being made.

The good news is that the TPP is on hold after the 12 governments involved were unable to reach agreement at their meeting in Hawaii at the end of July. However, negotiations will now continue later in the year.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in response to the July letter-writing action. •

THAI COURT FORCES SHUT DOWN OF NEWS SITE REPORTING ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The campaign to have the defamation charges dropped against Alan Morison (from Melbourne) and Chutima Sidasathian (from Thailand) has reached the next stage. The two journalists exposed the Thai navy personnel involved in trafficking Rohingya asylum seekers and were charged with defamation on 16 December 2013. Under Thai law, defamation is a criminal offence and the two journalists could face up to seven years imprisonment if found guilty.

Alan Morison has been forced to shut down his online news service, Phuketwan, while the trial against the pair proceeds. A verdict is expected soon.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in an attempt to have the case dropped. •

TAX INSPECTORS WITHOUT BORDERS GETS GREEN LIGHT

Tax Inspectors Without Borders is an exciting initiative to skill up people to stop multinational tax dodging. Tax experts go into developing countries and work

alongside local tax officials to build their skills and knowledge in cracking down on tax avoidance and tax evasion. This increases the ability of Governments to raise more of their own funds for things like schools and health clinics and reduce dependence on foreign aid.

Tax Inspectors Without Borders helped the Colombian Government collect an extra US\$30 million in 2014 compared to 2011.

The program has just been approved and will now move from being a trial to being permanently established. This is great news for the many developing countries being cheated by multinational corporate tax dodging.

Thanks to everyone who wrote to the Australian Government urging them to support this important global program. •

GLOBAL CRACKDOWN ON TAX DODGING BRINGS IN REVENUE

Our efforts to stop tax dodging by the wealthy is seeing results across the globe. Rich people with funds stashed off-shore are coming forward voluntarily in their tens of thousands ahead of new transparency rules that will allow tax authorities to open secret foreign accounts. The new rules involve automatic exchange of information (AEOI) between tax authorities, something many of you have assisted in campaigning for. The Australian Government has agreed to participate in the global system.

FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION UNIT

Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
130 Little Collins Street
Melbourne, Victoria 3000

Phone - (03) 9251 5271
Fax - (03) 9251 5241

jim@victas.uca.org.au
<http://www.justact.org.au>

All of the resources in this mailing can be found on the JIM website.

If you would like to subscribe (or unsubscribe) to either this hardcopy mailing (bi-monthly) or email update (weekly), contact the JIM Unit on the details above.

In total, governments across the world have so far been able to collect an extra \$56 billion as a result of AEOI moving towards being implemented.

The Australian Government has been able to collect an extra \$730 million in tax over the last two years due to exchanging tax information with selected countries.

Our next step is to ensure we see a change in the global tax rules so developing countries can also benefit.

Thanks to everyone who has been part of the campaign to see Australia participate in AEOI. •

PUNISHING THE UNEMPLOYED DOES NOT GET THEM A JOB

The Federal Government is continuing with its absurd policy to leave young unemployed people without financial support for a month each year, despite there not being jobs available.

The Department of Social Services has now conceded that forcing people under the age of 25 to wait a month for unemployment payments will not help them get jobs, describing it instead as a “decision of Government.”

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are now 880,000 Australians who are unemployed and looking for work, the largest number since 1994.

Cassandra Goldie, the CEO of ACOSS (the Australian Council Of Social Service) says, “People who are unemployed long term often face additional barriers to getting a job, including lack of recent work experience, a mismatch of skills with jobs available and real challenges to sustaining hope in the face of repeated rejections of about 10 job applications a

fortnight.”

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters opposing punishing unemployed people for failing to take jobs that do not exist. We will keep you updated in the campaign.

AUS VULNERABLE TO HIDING DIRTY MONEY

There has been new information released about our campaign to stop dirty money coming into Australia from developing countries. The two new reports from AUSTRAC – the Federal Government agency responsible for detecting the flow of dirty money in Australia – have revealed that real estate agents and lawyers offer pathways for the flow of dirty money into Australia.

“Criminals are drawn to real estate investment in Australia because it is possible to purchase in cash, it offers reliable returns and it is possible to disguise ownership.” Also, “Criminals also use professional facilitators such as lawyers to help them seem legitimate”.

The body that monitors efforts to stop the flow of dirty money globally, the Financial Action Task Force, reported in May that “Australia is seen as an attractive destination for foreign proceeds [of crime], particularly corruption-related proceeds, flowing into real estate, from the Asia-Pacific region.” The dirty money often passes through Singapore on its way to Australia.

The acknowledgment of the problem by AUSTRAC is a vital step forward in getting the Federal Government to make the changes needed in law to curb the flow of dirty money into Australia.

Thanks to everyone who has written letters or signed postcards on this issue. •

THAI SEAFOOD INDUSTRY CLEANS UP SLAVERY IN SUPPLY CHAIN

The JIM Unit has been working with the Australian and Thai seafood industries to stop any use of forced labour and human trafficking in their supply chains. In June, the Thai Frozen Food Association (TFFA), which represents most seafood producers, announced prawn peeling sheds will now have to comply with decent labour conditions.

When a seafood processing factory has more work than it can cope with, it can use a prawn peeling shed to pick up the extra work. The peeling sheds are separate businesses, but many use people who have been trafficked or subjected to forced labour.

To address the problem the TFFA has made processing factories responsible for the labour conditions at any peeling shed they use and each peeling shed will only be permitted to supply one factory at any one time. Peeling sheds will be placed on a Thai Government register. If labour abuses are found at a peeling shed the supervising factory will have its benefits of being a member of the TFFA suspended. Any factory that lies about the peeling sheds it sources from will be expelled from the TFFA.

It remains to be seen if these new measures will help put an end to forced labour and human trafficking in prawn peeling sheds, but the measures were welcomed by local human rights defenders in Thailand.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters to Australian companies importing seafood from Thailand. •

CAMBODIAN WORKERS GET A SMALL PAY INCREASE

The campaign to ensure Pacific Brands pays its Cambodian workers enough to live on has seen some small progress. Pacific Brands owns Bonds, Sheridan, Berlei, Tontine, Holeproof, Jockey and Voodoo.

Workers who make clothes in Cambodia are woefully paid. Despite working long hours they often go hungry.

The Cambodian Labour Advisory Committee has released a new minimum wage level for garment workers set at \$152 per month (around \$5 a day). However, this is still far below a level that would allow workers to escape a life in poverty. The Cambodian garment workers' unions are asking for a modest minimum wage of \$210 (US\$177) per month.

Pacific Brands has responded



to letters sent by Uniting Church members saying they source 3% of their manufactured products from three factories in Cambodia. Their reply states “Pacific Brands acknowledges that the principle of a living wage is an important step towards workers being able to provide for themselves and their families basic needs – such as housing, food, education and healthcare.”

The letter goes on to state:

“I can confirm that our suppliers in Cambodia are paying in excess of the national minimum wage which is currently set at USD 128 per month. Additional benefits provided also include transportation and meal allowances. Furthermore, we are monitoring the minimum wage recommended by the Coalition

of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (CCAWDU) of USD 177, and note that based on our assessment, our suppliers are currently achieving this for a substantial part of their workforce.”

This is a positive step forward. However all people working full-time should be getting US\$177 per month, at a minimum. The letter also fails to explain why Pacific Brands has not joined with other international brands in calling for a living wage across the whole of the clothing industry.

Members of the JIM Unit are scheduled to meet with representatives of Pacific Brands on 16 September to discuss the issue further.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters Pacific Brands. ●

GOOD GOVERNANCE KEY TO STOPPING BRIBES

It is currently illegal under Australian law for companies to pay large bribes overseas, but they are permitted to pay as many small bribes as they like, provided the bribes are to get officials to do things they should be doing anyway.

These small bribes have a deeply corrupting influence on the function of any government. The UK Government has already banned these bribes.

The Australian Government has moved to close one legal loophole. This will mean Australians can now be prosecuted for paying a

large bribe through a middle man whereas previously they could argue they didn't know they were paying it because they didn't know the identity of the official being bribed.

This is a great step forward along the path to fixing up Australia's anti-bribery laws.

Thanks to everyone who has supported the campaign to stop Australians paying any form of bribe to foreign officials.

CANTERBURY REFLECTS ON “WHAT TYPE OF AUSTRALIA DO WE WANT TO BE?”

BY DENISSE SANDOVAL

On July 26 I visited Habitat Uniting Church in Canterbury. In coordination with Habitat Uniting Church’s social justice committee, we ran a worship service inviting congregation members to articulate their core values in response to the question “What Type of Australia do We Want to Be?”

At the beginning, each congregation member was asked to rank societal values in line with their own vision for Australia. Joy, love, responsibility, understanding



and caring were some of the highly ranked values.

We then asked the question, “Are these values reflected in our current situation in Australia?” Each person then took a blank card and wrote down a slogan related to those values which we had reflected on earlier. At the front of the church there was a collection of rescued broken toys, some of which reminded us of our childhood in the 80s. We each chose a toy and fastened our cards to it, and in the end we had a collection of small toys with placards reading “Music brings people together”, “Arrogance is not awesome”, “I am a happy

child, well fed, I go to school, and I am never in detention”, “Jobs for youth”, “Be happy”, and “Protect our water tables, no GMO Crops”. The congregation was invited to participate in further steps to outline what we can do to make these values more prominent in our society. I am looking forward to returning to Habitat Uniting Church to work with them on the next steps and how to further progress taking action on this issue. If your congregation would like to host your own “What kind of Australia do we want to be?” service, contact Denisse Sandoval at denisse.sandoval@victas.uca.org.au •

In mid-August I spoke at the CommuniTAS residential weekend organised by the Presbytery of Tasmania at Camp Banksia in Port Sorrel. My talk was inspired by ‘communitas’, a Latin noun which refers to the very spirit of community.

We spent the weekend focussing on God’s calling to community through three themes:

- Belonging to a story beyond ourselves
- Knowing our neighbour
- Working for reconciliation in our world

Over the weekend we reflected together through art, conversations and activity on how

God is calling us to transform our world. The JIM Unit workshops focussed on identifying our own individual values, and how those values translate to our individual and collective motivations to act on social justice issues. Participants in the workshop were encouraged to identify local and national priorities for social justice work in the Church, and think through how they could “be the change they want to see in the world”.

If your congregations would like to partner with the JIM Unit in their social justice advocacy work, please contact me on 9251 5266 or via email: jill.ruzbacky@victas.uca.org.au •

THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY ALIVE IN TASMANIA

BY JILL RUZBACKY

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY: DID WE ACHIEVE WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO?

In 2000, governments agreed to eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015 to meet the needs of the world's poorest.

They ranged from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. The JIM Unit has worked with Micah Challenge and Make Poverty History to help achieve these goals over the last fifteen years. With Anti-Poverty Week coming up 11-17 October it is a good time to celebrate, reflect and ask what next?

Celebrate

Here's a small snapshot of what have we achieved through these goals and have to celebrate!

- The number of people now living in extreme poverty (by the measure of living on US\$1.25 a day) has declined by more than half
- More girls are now in school and more women are in parliament
- The number of children who die

before their fifth birthday has declined by more than half

- Fewer women die in childbirth, from HIV/AIDS and malaria and tuberculosis
- People have access to more toilets and clean water
- Despite cuts to Australia's aid budget, worldwide giving has increased.

Reflect

The conversation is shifting about how we need to address poverty. The JIM Unit understands eradicating poverty to mean developing sustainable societies. This means people have decent jobs, enough money to meet their basic needs, are not exploited by ruthless businesses, are free from persecution and violent conflict, and live in an environment that is healthy. These are the goals we need to work towards.

In sustainable societies people have decent work and decent pay. The rip-it-out-of-the-ground-and-leave-a-mess approach to development, where companies mine, log and extract resources and then walk away with the profits, means the jobs don't last and so sustainable societies don't develop.

A sustainable society means

everyone benefits, not just the wealthy few. The progress against income poverty has largely been met by China's resource boom style development which has not been shared equally. While it has meant a reduction in the number of people earning less than US\$1.25 per day, for every hundred dollars of additional income, the poorest fifth are receiving only twenty cents.

A sustainable society has accountable governments that meet the needs of their people. When companies steal from poorer countries by not paying taxes, the government is robbed of the money needed to provide for its people. We need to close tax loopholes and stop corporate criminals stealing from these governments.

What next?

The JIM Unit will continue to work with our supporters towards these aims through our campaigns on cutting corporate tax dodging, stopping slavery and human trafficking, fair work agreements, peace building and stopping dangerous climate change. We look forward to seeing what we can achieve together in the next fifteen years. •

Leanne has been a member of Habitat Uniting Church since 2007 and is the chair of the Social Justice committee.

Her interest in social justice was ignited as a young person when her mother took her to a peace march. She is active in Amnesty International human rights issues and believes in church members living out their faith through social justice. Leanne has three children, aged 10, 8 and 6. She tries to teach them to make informed choices. On 26 July she shared with me her inspiring words and wisdom on how to set up a social justice committee and why they're so important.

Why is social justice important to you?

LEANNE TULLY: I feel it is important to act on my beliefs and I believe that all people are valuable, the earth is valuable, but this is not always reflected in the way the world works. The church and other faiths teach love of God and neighbour, so we should act on that and do what we can to bring about a world where the reality reflects our true values. Social justice work is one way of expressing that love of neighbour. It gives us a way of trying to add to the sum total of good in the world. It is good for the church to be doing this, to be outward looking, being part of the world, and not just inward looking.

Who inspired you to be active in social justice?

LT: My mother Geraldine, from the Lilydale Uniting Church. She is also very involved in the social justice committee at her church. She took me to a Palm Sunday rally in the 80s. It was a Peace March against nuclear weapons. I have had an awareness of social justice issues since then; seeing my mother so involved in social

WHY AM I PASSIONATE ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE? AN INTERVIEW WITH LEANNE TULLY BY DENISSE SANDOVAL



justice had an impact on me.

What advice would you give to someone at a congregation without a Social Justice Committee who wants to start one?

LT: Start with getting the church council to support the idea (in our case the church council initiated the idea so that was easy) and maybe talk with people who are like minded, so you can put the case to the church council together as a group, to support initiating a committee. The wider church has always been involved in social justice work. Use the JIM website to find resources, and talk to Denisse at the JIM Unit for assistance. Pick a few issues, develop your knowledge about them, and set achievable goals, otherwise justice issues can be

overwhelming. Use the Social Justice days that JIM promotes, and let others know what is happening, for example promote Refugee Sunday.

What would you like to see more of in the world...

LT: I would like to see more congregations working together on social justice issues, like hosting a film night together. This way we can support each other's efforts. I would also like to see more info about what other groups are doing. This way we can be inspired by one another.

A big thanks to Leanne for agreeing to be interviewed! Stay tuned to this space to read about other UCA members who feel passionately about social justice. ●

ANTI-POVERTY WEEK PRAYER 11-17 OCTOBER

Lord, may we proclaim without compromise the message of ‘good news’ to the poor, a message of love, justice, truth, hope and above all human dignity.

May we work together to transform heart and minds so that those blinded by materialism come to ‘see anew’ that the goods of the earth, and creation itself, are for the good of all.

May we affirm each other’s gifts and encourage each other

as we work together to bring the ‘good news’ which ends poverty, promotes justice and upholds dignity.

We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

From: Salvation Army (Southern Corps) with assistance from Caritas Australia, endorsed by the VCC

ODDSPOT

Recent Roy Morgan polling shows the short answer is ‘yes’. Religious Australians aged 14 years old and over donate an average of 50% more to not-for-profit agencies annually than do atheists and agnostics. The average Australian gave \$288 to charities in the year to June 2014. Those who identify with a religion

gave an average of \$331 each in the year – over \$100 more per person than those who say they have no religion.

One in four religious Australians said they didn’t give anything to charity in the past year, compared with one in three non-religious Australians.

ATTENTION BENDIGO! SOCIAL JUSTICE DAY WORKSHOP

Sunday 27 September
Noon – 2:30pm (lunch provided)
Forest St. Uniting Church, 21 Forest St, Bendigo

On September 27 Denisse Sandoval will be running a workshop for Social Justice Day at Forest St and St Andrews Uniting Church in Bendigo. If you are interested in community building and community issues, you are more than welcome to attend. We will be asking “What type of Australia do we want to be?” To RSVP please contact Denisse: Denisse.sandoval@victas.uca.org.au

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