

JUSTACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

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NERVOUS STATES: HOW DISTRUST IS IMPACTING OUR DEMOCRACY



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In August 2020, we introduced readers of JustAct to the book 'Nervous States. How feelings took over the world' by William Davies, Professor in Political Economy at Goldsmiths, University of London.

We return to his work in this JustAct, as the book makes many observations about our current world that are relevant to the social justice mission of the churches. Moreover, his reflections make sense of the world we are now experiencing.

Davies points out that people are no longer willing to allow democracy to mean they get to vote every few years and then bow out to the elected political representatives, a theme that will be picked up at the JIM Convention this year. In his view:

Our familiar idea of mass democracy is the one in which most people are content to stay home and let someone else speak on their behalf- an elected representative, a judge, a professional critic, expert or commentator. It involves professionally managed parties, agencies, newspapers and publishers, through whom matters of importance are safely

routed, and where everyone plays by the same rules. But in order for this to work, the vast majority of people must be content to stay quiet most of the time and to trust those who speak in place of them. That, it seems, is something that people are increasingly reluctant to do. As trust in professional politicians and the media declines around the world, support for direct democracy has been rising.

He does not see this trend as negative, but rather it is something that will require our democracy to adapt to. Greater participation in the political system by more people should be something we welcome.

Professor Davies keeps returning to the theme that there has been a decline in trust in research and experts who have studied issues. Increasingly what matters is engagement:

As numerous mainstream political campaigns have discovered in recent years after losing to insurgents and newcomers, appealing to objectivity and evidence rarely moves people physically or emotionally. So what is it that prompts people to engage in such a direct fashion, and what governs

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them once they do? This question preoccupies advertisers, brand consultants and public-relations experts, as well as politicians. Social media platforms compete for the 'engagement' of audiences, seeking to hold our attention for as long as possible, with 'content' merely the bait. Once words and images are merely tools with which to mobilise and engage people, it ceases to matter so much if they are valid or objective reflections on reality. This is the anxiety that now surrounds 'fake news' and propaganda.

He points out that experts are no longer seen as objective and in-

dependent. There is justification in not blindly accepting the research of academics as unbiased and objective. However, taken to extremes, it allows people to dismiss any research that contradicts what they want to believe. The situation is not helped when scientists weigh into the political realm. For example, people who deny the human influence in driving climate change can partly justify dismissing climate change research when they can see climate change scientists campaigning with environmental groups. There are no easy answers here. A scientist may feel their ob-

jective findings require them to seek political action for the sake of people and the planet. However, doing so comes at the cost of being seen as less objective and impartial.

We look forward to you joining us to discuss these themes and how we respond to them and more from a Christian faith perspective at our JIM Convention on Saturday 6 November 2021. The event will run both in-person and online, depending on the situation with COVID-19 at that time. So please get in your registration form early so we can plan. A copy of the registration form is in this mailing. •

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT PASSES LAWS TO IMPROVE ONLINE SAFETY AND PROTECT CHILDREN

In June 2020 and again in April 2021, we requested that you write letters to the Federal Labor Party asking that they support reforms to make the online world a safer place, especially to protect children from sexual abuse.

There was good news on 22 June, with the Commonwealth Parliament passing the *Online Safety Act*. The new law gives the eSafety Commissioner greater powers to address cyberbullying of children, online abuse, harmful material being hosted online and dealing with non-consensual sharing of intimate images. The law also gives the eS-

afety Commissioner with stronger investigation powers to unmask anonymous accounts that are being used to inflict harm on people in the online world.

The Commonwealth Government provided an additional \$24.7 million to the eSafety Commissioner over four years in the May 2021 budget.

There was further good news on 24 June, when the Senate passed laws that will allow the Australian Government to enter into agreements with other governments to enable Australian law enforcement agencies to get timely access to information needed for investigations and prosecutions. At the moment, it can take up to 12 months for law enforcement agencies to get information to even identify someone

engaged in severe human rights abuses if the information about their identity is held overseas. The *Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (International Production Orders) Act 2021* will assist in making sure that police investigations into serious crimes, such as online child sexual abuse, are less likely to be frustrated by delays in getting access to information and evidence located overseas.

The law requires that the Commonwealth Ombudsman and the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security ensure law enforcement agencies use their new powers appropriately.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in support of making the online world a safer place. •

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

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ROHINGYA REFUGEES FACING A MEDICAL CRISIS ON BHASAN CHAR ISLAND

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters to the High Commissioner for Bangladesh in Australia and the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs in response to the letter-writing guide we issued in February 2021 regarding the Government of Bangladesh shifting Rohingya refugees to the island of Bhasan Char.

There was bad news at the end of June 2021. More than a quarter of the 18,000 Rohingya refugees transferred to the island suffering from an outbreak of gastro. At least three children had died as a result. There are inadequate health facilities on the island. There is no capacity for emergency medical care on the island.

Other refugees on the island have

died from other medical needs. Someone in need of urgent medical attention needs to be transferred by boat or helicopter to the mainland. The trip is three hours by boat and then a two-hour drive to a hospital. Human Rights Watch reported that a 35-year-old refugee said the time taken to obtain permission to leave the island might have cost the life of his wife, who died from complications during childbirth.

The situation for those on the island are likely to get worse during the monsoon season when both boat and helicopter services will be suspended during periods of bad weather.

In good news, at the start of May 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced that people from Myanmar in Australia on temporary visas would be permitted to apply to extend their stay. The move was in response to the military coup in Myanmar and the violent unrest

that has followed. Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, Alex Hawke, said, "This measure provides a means for Myanmar citizens in Australia to remain here until it is safe for them to return home."

Human rights groups say that since the military coup in February 2021, the military have been responsible for killing over 800 people and detaining nearly 6,000 others.

In early June 2021, the UN special rapporteur for Myanmar reported that the Myanmar military had mounted "brutal, indiscriminate attacks" that had forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in Kayah State.

Those fleeing the military action needed food, water, shelter, fuel, and access to healthcare. However, the military has impeded getting aid to the refugees by planting landmines on roads. •

ICC PROSECUTOR ASKS FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PHILIPPINES ADMINISTRATION

In October 2020, we invited you to write letters to the Filipino Ambassador to Australia and the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs regarding the murder and severe harassment of church ministers and members in the Philippines engaged in the social justice mission of the churches.

In June 2021, we requested that you write letters regarding the arrest and harassment of ministers and a bishop in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP).

The Uniting Church has a formal partnership with the UCCP.

In a positive development towards holding the Administration of President Duterte to account for the on-going human rights abuses in the Philippines on 14 June 2021, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, announced she had completed her preliminary investigation into the Philippines. She has requested judicial authorisation to proceed with an investigation. She stated that she believes there is a reasonable basis to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed in the Philippines between 1 July 2016 and 16 March 2019 due to

the Duterte Administration's "war on drugs". She stated that the evidence indicates that the Philippines National Police, and others working with them, unlawfully killed between several thousand and tens of thousands of civilians in that period.

The prosecutor was unable to investigate any human rights abuses committed by the police and military after 16 March 2019, as the Philippines Administration withdrew from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court on 17 March 2019.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the on-going efforts to end the human rights abuses in the Philippines. •

ANZ RESPONDS TO OUR LETTER-WRITING CAMPAIGN

In April 2021, we requested you write letters to the four largest Australian banks asking that they stop providing finance to fossil fuel projects.

The ANZ bank has replied to those of you who wrote to them. They stated in their response:

Since 2015, ANZ has funded or facilitated over \$32 billion to help our customers reduce their emissions, such as 'green' buildings, low emissions transport and renewable energy. During this same period, our thermal coal mining lending has been cut over 70% and will keep going down – it is now less than 0.1% of our total balance sheet. At the same time, our direct lending to renewables projects has gone up

by over 60%. Our lending to oil and gas has been relatively steady over this period.

The response indicates the bank is feeling pressure to reduce its role in supporting parts of the fossil fuel industry. However, there is still a commitment to profit from other parts of the fossil fuel industry and make slow progress on addressing emissions from the businesses they finance.

Thank you to those who have written letters to the banks on reducing their financing of fossil fuel projects. We will continue to provide future resources for you to keep reminding the banks that their financing of fossil fuel projects is out of step with the urgency most Australians feel is necessary to address climate change. •

SENATE VOTES DOWN ATTEMPT TO FUND GAS INDUSTRY THROUGH ARENA

In June 2021, we issued an urgent action that invited you to write to Senator Lambie and Senator Griff to disallow government regulations that would have allowed funds to be diverted to support gas corporations through the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA). The Senate voted to disallow the regulations, with both the Senators joining Senator Patrick, the Labor and Greens Senators in voting down the regulations. Thank you to everyone who wrote to the two Senators. •

SOME SUPPORT PROVIDED TO PEOPLE ON TEMPORARY VISAS EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Thank you to all of those people who wrote letters in response to the letter-writing guide we released in April 2020 asking for the Commonwealth Government to do more to protect and support people on temporary visas that experience family violence.

There has been good news on the issue. On 15 June 2021, the Minister for Women, Senator Marise

Payne, wrote to the Synod General Secretary stating that in April, the Commonwealth Government committed \$10 million to support people on temporary visas experiencing family violence. In the May budget, a further \$10.3 million was added to the initiative that will run until April 2023. The funding will support women on temporary visas unable to access social services and social security payments due to the restrictions imposed by the visa they are on. Support of up to \$3,000

will be provided through Red Cross Australia to help cover the costs of food, accommodation, utilities and other essentials. In addition, women leaving a violent relationship will be able to access legal assistance and migration support through funded Community and Women's Legal Centres across the country.

The initial funding is expected to provide financial support to more than 2,400 women on temporary visas experiencing family violence during its first two years. •

VICTORIAN GOV'T COMMITS TO REFORMS TO ADDRESS POLICE MISCONDUCT

In May 2019, we invited you to be part of a postcard campaign to the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, asking that his government establish a Police Corruption and Misconduct Division in the Victorian Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) as recommended by the 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into the external oversight of police corruption and misconduct in Victoria.

The postcard highlighted the case of Indigenous teenager Tommy Lovett. In April 2016, police were looking for a suspect described as

an 'Aboriginal male, aged in his 40s with a goatee and red hat'. Tommy was 18, wearing a black hat and riding a scooter on the way to visit his grandmother. Plainclothes officers from Darebin Police set upon Tommy. He was seriously assaulted, capsicum sprayed and ultimately hospitalised for his injuries.

Despite police members describing their colleagues' treatment of Tommy as unnecessary and "disturbing", the perpetrating police members faced no known consequences for their actions.

The Victorian Government has now stated that it will introduce new laws before the end of 2021, after public consultation, to address the current complaints system about police misconduct. The government stated:

The Government is committed to a robust police oversight and complaints system in which the roles of all agencies are clear, and community expectations regarding the independent oversight of police misconduct complaints are met.

This includes establishing a police misconduct complaints system that is complainant-centred, accessible to all Victorians and meets the needs of all complainants, including children and young people, Aboriginal people, women, survivors of family violence, LGBTIQ+ people, people with mental illness or disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people experiencing social or economic disadvantage.

Thanks to everyone who signed and sent off postcards and invited others to do likewise. •

WITNESS K SPARED PRISON

In August 2018, we issued a postcard targeting the Commonwealth Attorney-General asking for the charges against Witness K and his lawyer, Bernard Collaery, to be dropped.

That was followed up with a letter-writing action in February 2019. Witness K was the former Australian spy in his 70s who blew the whistle on Australian Government efforts in 2004 to cheat the government of Timor-Leste out of a fair share of the oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea. He had been part of an operation where Australian spies posed as aid workers, planting bugs in Timor-Leste Government cabinet offices.

Witness K and his lawyer were charged in 2018 with conspiring

to reveal classified information for blowing the whistle on the illegal spying operation.

The actions of Witness K and Bernard Collaery helped the Timor-Leste Government build a case against Australia at the international court in the Hague. As a result, the Australian Government renegotiated the treaty dividing up the rights to the oil and gas in the Timor Sea to give the people of Timor-Leste a fairer deal.

In mid-June, Witness K was sentenced after pleading guilty. He had not been given the legal protection of being a whistleblower under Australian law. Witness K was given a three-month suspended sentence. The magistrate found that Witness K's disclosing of classified information was motivated by justice and

not personal gain. The magistrate concluded that Witness K's disclosures were an attempt to get the Australian Government to "participate in the rules-based order of international relations."

Mr Collaery has continued to fight the charges against him. He faces the possibility of time in prison if found guilty.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters and sent postcards asking for the cases against Witness K and Bernard Collaery to be dropped. Please continue to gather signatures on the postcard campaign we issued in the last mailing calling on the Commonwealth Government to reform whistleblower laws. Public servants who expose government wrongdoing should be rewarded, not face the risk of imprisonment. •



SUPPORTER PROFILE

LYN MULLIGAN OAM

BY TIM MOLINEUX

For this edition of JustAct's support profile I phoned Lyn Mulligan of Ocean Grove and Queenscliff Uniting Churches on the first day of the latest COVID lockdown in Victoria, the perfect time to have a long chat with someone with a life story to tell.

Having met Lyn for the first time a few weeks earlier while visiting Ocean Grove on World Refugee Day, my impression of her can be described in one word: indomitable. Lyn is truly a force to be reckoned with, which extends from her ability to get things done, to her seemingly endless compassion for those who enter her life. As the fourth generation of her family living in Victoria, Lyn describes her own story as being blessed with a quiet regional life in her early years, fortunate with

love, and having enough to have her needs met. An intentional Christian life has spurred her to appreciate what life has given, and to give in return. Now in the later years of her life, the extent of Lyn's activities might not be the same as they once were, but she faithfully lives out her philosophy of: "Do what you can, no matter how small".

"One of my favourite quotes is '*service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth*', it's something Mahammad Ali said about the time he won the Peace Prize."

Lyn described her life as one called to the service of others, and in reference to the quote above, it's because she's "had a really good room here on earth". Two things stood out in the way Lyn described her earlier years which seemed to have a profound influence on her capacity to consider the needs of others; the first was the short life

of her sister born with quadriplegia and cerebral palsy, and the second was suddenly being exposed as a young idealistic regional girl to the needs of multicultural migrant communities. This was through her work as a casualty nurse at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Intercultural and interfaith dialogues are something that profoundly informed her faith and ministry.

"Forty years ago, I went back to school and studied at Deakin University in Geelong as one of the first mature age students, and even studied with some of my children's friends. I met more people of different nationalities and religions as I completed my Arts degree and majored in Religious Experience. Learning about different faiths had a lasting impact."

Another word to describe Lyn is worldly. Through work, study and travel, she has intentionally exposed herself to cultural and religious di-

versity which has deeply informed her capacity to respond to the world with compassion. Over the years, global changes saw her offer physical and spiritual support to refugees and people seeking asylum from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Iraq and Afghanistan. If you ever have the honour of being hosted at one of Lyn's after church Sunday lunches, you will see a house full of photos serving as permanent reminders of the lives she has touched, each one impacting her equally in return. It's a ministry supported by her husband, now passed, and four children, and her ten grandchildren.

Lyn had a sudden illness five years ago which resulted in a less active life. The sense of community she gets from Ocean Grove and Queenscliff UC is even more important for this stage of her life. Much of the work she does now is only possible with the combined support of her churches' Social Justice Group, Queenscliff Rural Australians for Refugees, and the local men's

shed. Today, Lyn's garage serves as a holding shed for bikes, furniture, and bedding for anyone in need, all supplied by the community that surrounds her.

Lyn has always believed that social justice as lifelong ministry. Informing this view is lifetime of experience and the wisdom of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Søren Kierkegaard. Unsurprisingly, she has been influenced by the Quran and the Dalai Lama. Now days, she's a person confident in her Christian identity being firmly grounded in the Uniting Church. For Lyn, it's because action speaks louder than words. When I asked what message she had for people in the church today, Lyn's own speak for themselves:

"We have been promised there will be a coming again with the resurrection. Christ never lied, and I think the world is worth saving when there are people who are making sacrifice now. We need to get the message across that there

can be another reformation now. I feel there are people who are waiting to do good, and they should be encouraged to go out there and practice their faith. It really doesn't matter if it's in a small or big way. Be inspired. Be inspiring. Go ahead and pray, but do something about it all the same. Just imagine if we all did something about it. If you think love will prevail, then you also need to learn that love demands action. You do this in whatever capacity you can. You learn to adapt as you get older. I certainly did. But we can all do a little bit, every effort isn't wasted. It matters. Don't just listen, just act. You might find stops and storms on the way, but you'll succeed as long as you do something, no matter how small the goodness is, it will go out in ripples. It's easier than you think once you get started. I promise you that you'll get more out of life." •

A SMALL STEP WAS TAKEN IN THE DIRECTION OF GLOBAL TAX JUSTICE

In June 2020 and again in February 2021, we invited you to write letters to the Australian Government to support efforts towards establishing a minimum level of tax multinational corporations must pay globally.

There was good news in June 2021, when 130 governments agreed that some of the largest multinational corporations should be required to pay a minimum tax rate of 15%. These governments cover more than 90% of the Gross Domestic Product globally in their economies. In addition, the measure will require the corporations to

pay the tax in places where they are doing business, rather than paying tax based on artificial legal structures that channel profits into tax havens. The US Administration had sought to have the minimum tax rate set at 21%, but European Governments insisted on 15% if a deal was to be reached.

The deal is expected to generate more than an extra \$200 billion in taxes paid globally.

Unfortunately, there is still a lot of detail to be sorted out to implement the global minimum tax rate, which will leave open the risk that loopholes will be put in place that allow the corporations to dodge having to pay the tax in full.

The deal between governments

will also see these large multinational corporations pay more tax in the places where they sell their goods and services. The bias to grant more tax in places where there are sales will favour wealthy countries over developing countries, as most sales from these corporations occur in rich countries. If the increased tax had been based on where production occurs, more of the extra tax would have been paid in developing countries.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the campaign for tax justice to deliver revenue that will provide vital services to ordinary people, especially in developing countries. •

THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT PROMISES MORE VACCINES FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



In the June 2021 JustAct, we included a postcard action calling on the Australian Government to do more to allow developing countries to gain access to COVID-19 vaccines.

In mid-June, there was good news when the Commonwealth Government announced it would provide at least 20 million vaccine doses to developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region as part of a global effort by the G7 countries. The vaccine doses will be provided by mid-2022. The vaccines will be a mix of those produced by Astra-Zeneca, Pfizer and Moderna.

The Australian Government has already donated 500,000 vaccine doses to the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste between March and July 2021. Vaccines donated by Australian and New Zealand Governments were now enough to vaccinate the entire population of the Pacific Island country of Tuvalu, providing them with 11,800 doses.

The Commonwealth Government will provide \$523 million over three years to support vaccine roll-outs in the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the Australian Government is still one of the governments holding out on supporting a waiver at the World Trade Organisation. The waiver would put aside the intellectual property claims of multinational pharmaceutical corporations to allow developing country governments access to the technology to manufacture their own vaccines. The Australian Government is one of only 12 governments that oppose the waiver. There are over 120 governments that support the waiver.

Oxfam, UNAIDS and the Health Justice Initiative calculated that as of the start of June 2021, a person living in one of the wealthy G7 countries was 77 times more likely to be offered a COVID-19 vaccine than those living in the world's most financially impoverished countries. Only 0.3% of vaccines have been

supplied to low-income countries with a population similar to the G7 countries.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) expressed concern in early July that wealthy countries were ordering booster shots for their vaccinated populations while low-income countries did not have access to enough vaccines to protect their frontline health workers. In addition, the WHO expressed concern that Pfizer and Moderna were seeking to profit from selling the booster shots to wealthy countries instead of supplying vaccines to middle and low-income countries. The WHO also pointed out there was no medical evidence that booster shots were needed at this time.

Thank you to everyone that has signed and sent off postcards to the Prime Minister. Please keep encouraging our government to share vaccines and vaccine technology with developing countries by inviting others to sign and send postcards. Extra cards can be ordered by e-mailing jim@victas.uca.org.au or phoning 0409 166 915. •