

# JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

OCTOBER 2021

## SYNOD PROJECT TO SUPPORT PACIFIC ISLAND WORKERS ON FARMS

**The JIM Cluster is in a partnership with the Salvation Army, the Pacific Islands Council of Queensland and the Pacific Islands Council of South Australia to facilitate building links between people from Pacific Islands and Timor Leste working on Australian farms and local communities. The Commonwealth Government have provided the \$1 million for the project that will run until the end of 2022.**

The workers on the farms have come on the Commonwealth Government Seasonal Worker Program, which brings people from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste to work on Australian farms for up to nine months.

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is managing the project in Victoria, Tasmania and southern NSW.

The Synod has employed Taua Ritiata to connect people from the Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste working on Tasmanian farms with local community groups, including churches. Taua is from Kiribati and has been working for a labour-hire business to support workers from the Pacific Islands in Tasmania. He is employed two days a week by the Synod. He is keen to connect with any congregations interested in building a relationship with workers in their area.

Taua can be contacted by e-mail [taua.ritiata@victas.uca](mailto:taua.ritiata@victas.uca).



[org.au](http://org.au)

Taua has already been able to make significant progress in connecting workers with the local community in Tasmania. Workers from Kiribati have been attending the Ulverstone Uniting Church. Workers from Kiribati were also invited to have a meal with Forth Lion's Club.

Taua facilitated Longford Uniting Church hosting a meeting for workers from Vanuatu with local community members. •

# GOV'T RELEASES NEW AGRICULTURE VISA FOR TEMPORARY WORKERS

**In our last JustAct, we requested that you write to the Commonwealth Government to express concern about their plans to introduce a new visa class for people from Asian countries to come and work temporarily on Australian farms.**

Our concern was that the Government had provided mixed messages about the safeguards the visa would have against people on the visa being exploited. Further, we are concerned that the new visa would undercut the safeguards on the Seasonal Worker Program and the Pacific Labour Scheme.

On 30 September, the Commonwealth Government introduced the new visa, the Australian Agriculture Worker visa. The visa will allow people to work in horticulture, meat processing, dairy, wool, grain production, fisheries and forestry. The visa will be available to people to participate from any country where Australia has negotiated an agreement with the government of that country.

The positives with the new visa are:

- Employers must be vetted before they will be allowed to offer work to people on the new visa;
- Workers who are exploited will be allowed to apply to change

employers;

- There is an intention that workers have access to community support;
- The visa is for four years and will allow a worker to travel home multiple times in that period to maintain contact with their family and support back in their home country; and
- The new visa arrangement will be reviewed after two years of operation.

On the negative side:

- It appears workers will fund their own travel costs to Australia upfront, opening them up to having debts to loan sharks to get to Australia. Under the Seasonal Worker Program and the Pacific Labour Scheme, the employer assists the worker with travel costs;
- There is no required access for unions to meet with the workers on the visa. Workers on the Seasonal Worker Program have a right to meet with union representatives when they arrive in Australia; and
- The workers appear to have to arrange their own private health insurance and will not have access to Medicare. On the Seasonal Worker Program and the Pacific Labour Scheme, the employer usually organises the private health insurance for the

worker, with the insurance payments coming out of the worker's pay.

There remain questions over the need for the new visa arrangements. Currently, the main restriction on workers coming to Australia to work in Australian agriculture is the limited number of quarantine places available. Creating a new visa to allow people from additional countries to come does nothing to solve the limited number of quarantine places.

On 30 September, the Commonwealth Government also announced 55,000 people from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste were ready to come and work on Australian farms. Of these people, 25,000 were already fully vaccinated with vaccines donated by the Australian Government.

On 14 September, the Government had announced that people from Timor Leste and the Pacific Islands would be allowed to come and work temporarily in hotels and resorts in rural and regional Australia at peak tourism times.

Thank you to everyone who wrote to the government to ask for safeguards against exploitation with the new visa arrangement. If you did not get a chance, it is not too late to do so. The letter writing template can be found at our website <https://justact.org.au/resources/> •

## FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

Mark Zimsak – Senior Social Justice Advocate  
Tim Molineux – Social Justice Officer

Uniting Church in Australia  
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania  
Centre for Theology and Ministry  
29 College Crescent  
Parkville, Victoria 3052

Phone - (03) 9340 8807

[jim@victas.uca.org.au](mailto: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 Cluster.

# GOVERNMENT CHECKS QUALITY OF ACCOMMODATION FOR WORKERS FROM PACIFIC ISLANDS AND TIMOR LESTE



**With your support, the JIM Cluster has campaigned for reforms to the Seasonal Worker Program to ensure people from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste are treated well while working on Australian farms.**

We have been informed of problems with poor quality accommodation for the workers or overcharging on accommodation arrangements. Similar allegations have been raised in the media.

We had requested in August 2020 that you write letters to the Com-

monwealth Government asking for reforms to the Program to reduce the risks of workers being exploited and mistreated. Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the action.

In response, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Skills and Employment that administers the Seasonal Worker Program has taken steps to ensure that workers are provided with decent accommodation at market rates or less.

The Department has reported that since April 2021, it has inspected 54 accommodation arrangements linked to 19 employers on the Program. Thirty-two of the locations

visited were in Victoria.

Of the 54 accommodation arrangements inspected:

- 87% were found to match the requirements of the Program;
- 11% had minor issues the employer was required to address (such as there being fewer washing machines available to workers than the employer had promised); and
- One accommodation arrangement was found to be in serious non-compliance with the requirements of the Program.

Employers have been required to fix the problems identified by the Department's inspections. •

## COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT PROMISES CO-DESIGNED REFORMS FOR UNEMPLOYMENT SCHEME TARGETED AT FIRST PEOPLES

**In April 2018, we invited you to write letters to the Commonwealth Government asking that they redesign the Community Development Program with negotiation with First Peoples' organisations.**

The Community Development Program (CDP) is a Commonwealth

Government program that has resulted in discrimination against and exploitation of many First People locked out of the normal job market. The CDP requires people in remote areas to work in jobs for well below the minimum award rate or not receive any social security payments for being unemployed.

There was good news on 1 September 2021, when the Minister for

Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, announced that the CDP would be replaced by co-designed reforms with First Peoples organisations. The replacement arrangements would come into operation in 2023. A pilot of the new arrangements will be trialled before the end of 2021.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in support of the reform of the CDP. •



# PROGRESS ON SHARING VACCINES WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

**In June 2021, we requested that you participate in a postcard campaign urging the Australian Government to provide more COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries.**

The postcards also called on the Australian Government to support a waiver on intellectual property rights for vaccines so they could be manufactured for developing countries at lower cost.

In early September, the Commonwealth Government stated that it would support the waiver of intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines.

In late September, US President Joe Biden announced the US Administration would increase its purchase of Pfizer vaccines to 500 million doses to share with other countries, bringing the total it will supply to developing countries to 1.1 billion doses. Pfizer has agreed

to provide the vaccines at cost. The US Administration will also provide \$510 million to assist developing countries with the distribution and administration of vaccines and provide oxygen supplies to hospitals treating COVID-19 patients. The aim would be to have 70% of the global population vaccinated within a year. The target had been recommended by the World Health Organisation and the World Bank.

The Australian Government pledged to share an extra 40 million COVID-19 vaccine doses with developing countries in response to the US announcement. The additional 40 million doses are on top of 20 million doses the Australian Government promised to provide to developing countries at the summit of G7 nations in June. By late September, the Australian Government had shared 3.2 million doses of vaccine with developing countries. The Australian Government has also committed \$623.2 million to assist developing countries with the roll-

out of vaccines. In addition, by late September, the Australian Government had donated 4,000 ventilators, 2,000 oxygen concentrators, and over 100 tonnes of personal protective equipment and medical supplies.

The Japanese Government has pledged to share 60 million doses of vaccine with developing countries.

The World Bank reported substantial inequality in the rate of vaccine rollout between wealthy and developing countries at the end of August. While almost half of all people in high-income countries have been fully vaccinated, only 2% of adults in developing countries have been vaccinated. For example, only 3.6% of Africa's adult population has been vaccinated.

This campaign is ongoing, and postcards are still available. If you would like more postcards, don't hesitate to get in touch with us at e-mail [jim@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:jim@victas.uca.org.au) or call 0409 166 915. •

## PASTOR RELEASED FROM DETENTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

In June 2021, we requested that you write letters seeking the release of Pastor Daniel Balucio (aged 62), a pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). Pastor Balucio had been detained after police raided his accommodation on 2 May 2021. The police planted guns and a grenade at his home to justify his arrest as an alleged member of the armed communist New Peoples Army. In good news, Pastor Balucio was released from detention on 13 August 2021 after a court threw out the trumped-up charges.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters asking for the release of Pastor Balucio.

## SYNOD FUNDS HUMAN RIGHTS WORKS IN THE PHILIPPINES WITH PARTNER CHURCH

**The JIM Cluster has committed to supporting our partner church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), with \$15,000 a year for work to promote and protect human rights in the Philippines.**

With the funding that was provided in 2020, the UCCP was able to:

- Train 46 of their leaders from across ten provinces to conduct para-legal and advocacy work

defending human rights;

- Provide sanctuary to 25 individuals and seven families being subjected to death threats or harassment by security forces in connection with their social justice activities;
- Achieve the release from detention of Rev Dan San Andres in July 2020. Rev San Andres was being held on trumped-up charges;
- Campaign for the release of Pastor Daniel Balucio;
- Carry out two missions to pro-

vide food, clothes and medicines to communities that have been impacted by intense military activities by the Philippines army;

- Conduct three online forums addressing the topics of the human rights implications of the Philippines Anti-Terror Act, the death penalty and sowing just peace in these dangerous times; and
- Establish a podcast platform for communities to raise human rights concerns, producing over 25 podcasts. •

## DUTERTE ADMINISTRATION TO BE INVESTIGATED BY THE ICC

**In October 2020, we requested that you write letters to the Philippines Ambassador and the Australian Government about the campaign of extrajudicial killings being orchestrated by the Duterte Administration.**

In good news, on 15 September 2021, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that it granted the request by the ICC prosecutor for an investigation into the campaign of mass murder carried out

during the so-called ‘war on drugs’ between 1 November 2011 and 16 March 2019. The Court considered the request from the families of 204 victims as part of its deliberations. But, unfortunately, the Duterte Administration withdrew from the jurisdiction of the ICC on 17 March 2019. Hence, the ICC cannot investigate any crimes against humanity committed by the Philippines security forces after that date.

The Duterte Administration responded to the ICC by stating that it would not co-operate with the in-

vestigation and prevent ICC investigators from entering the country.

“Even if it takes a long time, at least we have something to look forward to instead of just waiting for nothing”, said the mother of an alleged victim of extrajudicial killing by a police death squad. “At least we have hope.”

Thank you to everyone that has supported the campaign to protect human rights and seek social justice in the Philippines during the current period of mass murder conducted by the police and army. •

# SPORTSBET IS ONE OF THE FIVE LARGEST SPENDERS ON ADVERTISING IN AUSTRALIA



**Online gambling corporations' advertising and marketing activities drive people to spend more on gambling than they otherwise would, increasing the harm from gambling in our community.**

Advertising has also been shown to cause children to associate sport and advertising. Three-quarters of children aged 8 to 16 think betting on sport is normal and can name one or more sports betting companies because of all the sports gambling advertising they have been exposed to. Further, 6% of children aged 12 to 17 have gambled online. If a child gambles, it increases their

risk of being harmed due to gambling as an adult.

In April 2017, we requested you write letters to the Commonwealth Government asking that they introduce a ban on advertising by online gambling corporations. A postcard action followed up that action in June 2020.

The UK corporation that owns Sportsbet, Flutter, has revealed that Sportsbet spent \$139 million on advertising and sponsorship in Australia in 2020, placing it in the same league as Coles, Woolworths and Harvey Norman when it comes to advertising spending. It is in the top five corporations when it comes to marketing spending.

Flutter told its shareholders that Sportsbet outspent its nearest com-

petitor by almost 80% on advertising in 2020.

Australians spent \$6.9 billion on online gambling in 2020.

Gambling corporation Tabcorp has stated that it would support a ban on gambling advertising before 8:30 pm.

The JIM Cluster still has postcards to the Commonwealth Government if you did not have a chance to send one or if you can distribute them to your congregation, family or friends. If you would like some, e-mail jim@victas.uca.org.au or phone 0409 166 915.

You can also sign a petition at: <https://www.endgamblingads.org.au/>

# SENATE PASSES BILL TO BAN THE IMPORTATION OF GOODS MADE WITH FORCED LABOUR

**In April 2021, we asked you to write letters to the Commonwealth Government asking them to introduce a law that would allow goods likely to have been produced with the involvement of modern slavery to be seized at the border.**

There was good news on 23 August when the Senate passed a Bill to ban the importation of goods into Australia made with forced labour involvement. Independent Senator Rex Patrick put forward the Bill. However, the Bill was not supported by the Government Senators, and it still needs to pass the House of Representatives. The Bill can only

pass in the House of Representatives if some Government MPs break ranks and vote to pass the Bill.

However, the Bill passing the Senate helps push the Government towards taking more significant action on goods coming into Australia that have been produced with modern slavery. •



# PARLIAMENT PASSES LAWS TO CURB ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

**In April 2021, we requested that you write letters to the Labor Party at the Commonwealth level seeking their support for the Government's *Surveillance Legislation Amendment (Identify and Disrupt) Bill 2020* to curb online child sexual abuse and other online human rights violations.**

There was good news on 25 August, with the Bill passing through the Parliament with the support of the Labor Party.

The new law provides three new types of warrants police can seek to address severe human rights abuses facilitated online:

- Warrants that will allow the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC)

the power to identify networks of human rights abusers, such as those that assist each other in child sexual abuse, and establish the identity of the individuals involved. Technology corporations often provide such networks with tools that allow them to conceal their identities.

- Warrants that will allow the AFP and ACIC to modify and destroy online data to prevent online human rights abuses and remove child sexual abuse material when technology corporations refuse to remove such material.
- Warrants that allow the AFP and ACIC to take control of the account of someone engaged in serious human rights abuses to gather evidence about others involved in the human rights violations. Before the passage of the law, police could only take over the online account of someone

engaged in human rights violations if they agreed to allow the police to do so.

The warrants need to be approved by a judge or a member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal unless there is a situation where police need to immediately take action to prevent a serious threat to a person's wellbeing.

On 7 September 2021, the Commissioner for the AFP reported that the AFP and its partner law enforcement agencies had charged 235 people with 2,772 offences related to child sexual abuse between July 2020 and June 2021.

The use of the new powers by the AFP and ACIC will be overseen by the Commonwealth Ombudsman and the Inspector-General of Intelligence.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters to the Labor Party asking them to support the Bill. •

# THE CURE FOR HATE

**With people holding extreme political views being part of recent violent protests in Melbourne, the book 'The Cure for Hate' is a very topical and worthwhile read.**

Canadian former white supremacist Tony McAleer wrote the book on his life journey from being a leader in the racist hate movement to being a founder of the group 'Life after Hate'. Life after Hate assists people to exit from hate groups.

Tony's book engages the reader with his autobiographical story. His difficult relationship with his father comes through as a factor in the decisions he makes. He stumbles on his father having a sexual affair with another woman when Tony was ten. He was subjected to a regime of brutal corporal punishment at school. His descent into hatred was fuelled by a desire to belong and be accepted, as well as plenty of alcohol and the influence of racist music. Thus, falling in with a skinhead gang provided a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Tony relates that someone once asked him, "How did you lose your humanity?"

"I didn't lose it", he replied. "I traded it for acceptance and approval until there was nothing left."

Tony does not try to hide behind the situation he grew up in and fully accepted that he had agency over the decisions he made.

He quotes Catholic priest Richard Rohr that "If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly

transmit it."

Tony's narrative of his time inside the Canadian and US white supremacist movements reveals that laws restricting these extremist groups from spreading their ideology effectively limited their ability to recruit new followers. However, at the same time, such restrictions motivated those already in the movement to more extreme actions.

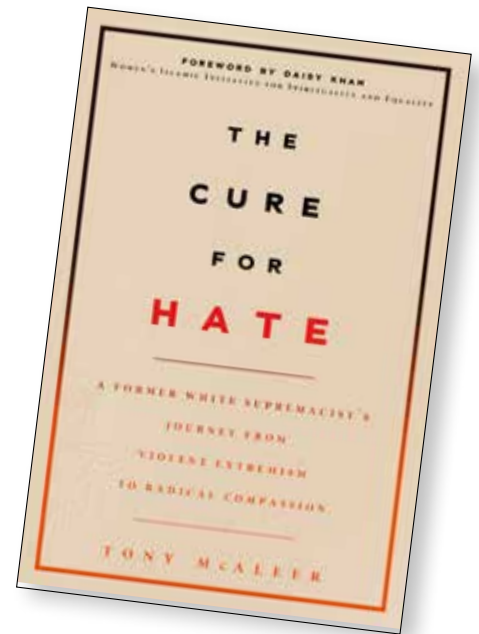
Part of Tony's transformation back from his white supremacist extremism was the unconditional love he experienced from his children. He came to the realisation, "The irony is that the skinhead and white

“ I TRADED MY HUMANITY FOR ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL UNTIL THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT ”

power scenes were the last places I wanted my kids to be – especially my daughter, because of the misogynistic views and treatment of women.”

What also comes through in his narrative is that he also was given unconditional love by his mother, who at the same time tried to steer him back from the extremist movement:

*My mother never gave up on me, even though she despised what I believed, lost friends, had to carry the stigma in the workplace, and harboured a great deal of shame over the simple fact she was my mother. The easiest thing she could have done would have been*



*to condemn me and throw me under the bus. But she didn't. My mother saw the humanity in me, even when I couldn't see it myself. Nobody is irredeemable.*

On his path back from extremist ideology, Tony sought out people from communities he had harmed. He apologised to Sikh communities, Jewish congregations, Holocaust survivors and members of the LG-BTQI community. He

expected to be met with anger but overwhelmingly was shown compassion and forgiveness for what he had done.

One of the most moving parts of the book is when Tony visited the Auschwitz death camp and felt the significant weight of having promoted Holocaust denial.

Tony promotes compassion and non-violence as the antidotes to extremism: "When we are compassionate, we reflect someone's whole humanity back at them if they are incapable of seeing it on their own."

Tony's reflections on how to overcome hatred and extremism mirror many of the calls to us in the Gospels on how to respond to people. •