

# JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

APRIL 2022



## HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

“ Our ministries and mission as a Church have been touching and transforming lives and communities, but we have been subjected to severe persecution by the State forces that are happy to shame the identity of our leaders and sow intrigues among the members in the local churches. Aside from these, actual harassment and persecution have been manifested in cases compiled by the Justice, Peace and Human Rights program. ”

*Uniting Church of Christ in the Philippines,  
Pastoral letter to members from the Bishops and lay leaders, Oct 2021*

**The Synod continues to work in partnership with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) to address the human rights abuses targeted at the Philippines' people by the Administration of President Duterte.**

In February 2022, the Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Professor Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri stated that the WCC would continue to call on the Philippine Government to “stop red-tagging churches and civil society organisations, to end the war on drugs, to take measures to hold human rights violators accountable, and to respect and uphold the human rights of the Filipino people.” The Uniting Church in Australia is a member of the WCC.

‘Red-tagging’ is where people connected with the Philip-

pinas security forces state that church leaders and human rights defenders are in league with the communist armed opposition groups in the Philippines. Such an accusation is often a precursor to being targeted for extrajudicial execution.

In the pastoral letter to members of October 2021, the bishops and lay leaders of the UCCP called on their members to:

- *Hold fast to our faith in the God of justice and peace, who will sustain us in our prophetic witness in the life of society and the world through regular prayer time for justice and peace;*
- *Strengthen our ranks by reviewing or studying biblical-theological foundations of human life with dignity and constitutional and legal basis of human rights;*
- *Express our genuine concern for the victims of human rights violations in our church and those in the larger soci-*

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ety and extend various kinds of support, whether psycho-social, spiritual, material, legal or financial;

- Local churches and conferences [which are presbyteries in the Uniting Church in Australia] are advised to establish their Justice, Peace and Human Rights Committee and Quick Reaction Team for an organised and systematic approach to programs and responses to people and communities under threat due to the heightening of political repression and the dire economic situation in the country;

- Optimise networking with civilian local government units and like-minded NGOs for access to free legal assistance and other forms of support for victims of human rights violations; and
- Protect yourselves and your families by heightening your awareness of your surroundings, especially for suspicious individuals and movements.

Together, let us put on the armour of faith – our prophetic faith and witness, our courage to fight the evil schemes through our wise decisions and strategies for collective action in protecting our lives, our rights and welfare and

those of vulnerable people.

The UCCP has documented that 199 members of its laity and 42 church workers have been subjected to human rights violations since 2016. Of those, 194 have been targeted with death threats, intimidation, social media attacks and harassment. Fourteen were illegally detained at the time, in October 2021, due to illegal arrest, trumped-up charges and the planting of evidence. Four of those targeted were extra-judicially executed. Thirty have been released from unlawful detention after the trumped-up charges against them have been overturned. •



# ICC SUSPENDS FULL INVESTIGATION INTO PHILIPPINES ADMINISTRATION CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

**On 10 November 2021, the Philippines Administration had requested that the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) defer his investigation into the alleged crimes against humanity carried out by**

**Philippines police and death squads employed by them.**

In response to the request, the Prosecutor requested the Philippines Administration provide evidence they were conducting thorough investigations to address the allegations of crimes against

humanity. Accordingly, the Prosecutor has suspended his investigation while waiting for a response from the Philippines Administration. However, the Prosecutor will continue to analyse the information already in his possession and any new information provided to it by third parties. •

## FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

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

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# AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE MORE FUNDING FOR HEALTH SYSTEMS IN OUR REGION

**In the February JustAct we requested you write letters to the Commonwealth Government requesting increased assistance to developing countries in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

There was good news on 14 February 2022. The Commonwealth Government announced an additional \$375 million over five years to strengthen health systems in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, as of the start of March, only 4% of people in low-income countries have had two doses of vaccines against COVID-19. As a

result, the death toll from COVID-19 has been four times higher in lower-income countries than in wealthy ones. The pandemic has pushed 160 million people into poverty, and 137 million people globally have lost their jobs.

The impact of the pandemic has been highly unequal. Forty people globally have become billionaires as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic through profits generated as a result of the virus. The pandemic has seen the world's ten richest men double their fortunes, earning them collectively \$1.3 billion a day.

Pharmaceutical corporations like Pfizer continue to lobby governments to block sharing vaccine

technologies to developing countries to preserve their patent monopoly. They have the support of the UK, Swiss and European Governments, who continue to block a temporary waiver of World Trade Organisation rules to allow for technology related to COVID-19 vaccines, treatments, and tests to be shared with developing countries.

The Australian Government supports a waiver to allow the technology to be shared.

Thank you to everyone that have sent letters and postcards to the Commonwealth Government urging more significant support to developing countries in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. •

## AGRICULTURAL VISA CAPPED

**In August 2021, we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government asking that the safeguards for their announced new agricultural visa match the worker safeguards for workers from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste that come on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme.**

There was good news in February 2022 that the new agricultural visa will be capped at just 1,000 places per country. The low numbers will mean that people in the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste will not

be squeezed out of coming to Australia by workers from other countries on the new visa. People from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste that come to Australia on the PALM scheme often find the money they earn in Australia assists them to overcome situations of financial poverty they have come from.

So far, no Asian countries have signed up to send workers to Australia on the new agriculture visa.

The number of workers on the PALM scheme in Australia is expected to double to 40,000 during 2022.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters to the Commonwealth Government about the need for proper safeguards for the new agricultural visa. •

## AUS GOV'T RESPONDS TO HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE CONCERNS IN WEST PAPUA

**We invited you to write to the Australian Government regarding human rights concerns in West Papua in October 2021.**

Thank you to everyone who wrote the letters. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has replied to those who wrote stating that the Australian Embassy in Indonesia has recently resumed visiting West Papua to meet with civil society groups and religious leaders. They promised to continue monitoring the situation in West Papua and engage further with the Indonesian Government on how fundamental human rights can be upheld. •



# COMMONWEALTH INTRODUCES ADDITIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTIONS FOR TECH CORPORATIONS

**The JIM Cluster has been inviting you to seek reforms to make the online world a safer place and curb the level of human rights abuses facilitated by multinational technology corporations.**

On 20 January 2022, the Commonwealth Government issued the *Online Safety (Basic Online Safety Expectations) Determination*. The Determination is an enforceable regulation requiring technology corporations to take some steps to reduce the ability of people to engage in human rights abuses online. The measures include the requirement for the corporations to detect, report and remove (as applicable) material or activity on their online service that is unlawful or harmful.

A survey released at the start of March 2022 found 75% of Australians believe there are benefits from social media. However, 56% be-

lieve that social media does more harm than good. In comparison, only 28% believe that the benefits of social media outweigh the harms it facilitates. Furthermore, more of those aged 18-24 think social media does more harm than good than the other way around.

Of those surveyed, 17% reported being negatively affected by social media. Further, 28% said that a family member had been negatively affected by social media. One-third of respondents with children in their household reported the children had been negatively affected.

As further evidence of the harms that need to be curbed in the online world, on 2 March 2022, the Australian Federal Police announced the completion of Operation Molto, which had started in 2019. It resulted in 51 children in Australia being removed from further harm. A total of 121 Australians were charged with 1,248 child abuse-related of-

fences. Eight children in Victoria were rescued, and 18 alleged offenders were arrested. Two children were removed from further harm in Tasmania, and three alleged offenders were arrested. The offenders came from various occupations, including construction, transport, the police and hospitality.

The operation started after the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs detected thousands of offenders using a cloud storage platform online to share vile child sexual abuse material.

The operation was conducted with other police forces across the globe. In addition to children in Australia who were rescued from further harm, 79 children in the UK were rescued, 12 in Canada, six in New Zealand, four in the US and one in Europe.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the campaign to make the online world a safer place. •

## CLEANING UP CORPORATE MISBEHAVIOUR

**In July 2017, we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government asking that they introduce several measures to address corporations' criminal and unethical behaviour.**

One of the requested measures was the introduction of a Director Identification Number (DIN). Under the corporate registration system at the time, it was effortless to set up a company with front directors,

who were people not actually making decisions about the company. It was also straightforward to use false names and addresses to create fictitious directors. The use of fake directors assisted criminals to use corporations for activities such as wage theft, money laundering, tax evasion and fraud. Having fake directors made it easier to get away with such abusive activities.

The Commonwealth Government has implemented a system of having a DIN, which will make it much harder to set up fake directors as

a front for a corporation. People applying for a DIN must provide a myGovID and two additional identity documents.

Existing company directors must register for a DIN by 30 November 2022. As of 5 April 2022, anyone seeking to become a company director for the first time needed to obtain a DIN before becoming a company director.

Thank you to everyone who wrote in support of implementing Director Identification Numbers. •

# VIC GOV'T CONTINUES TO ACT ON FAMILY VIOLENCE WITH EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

**The Victorian Government has already implemented significant actions to address family violence, committing \$3.5 billion to address family violence.**

One measure was the establishment of offices across Victoria, known as the 'Orange Door' network. The Orange Door network assists survivors of family violence in accessing the support they need to

reduce the complexity of the support system. On 25 February 2022, the Victorian Government announced that the Orange Door network had supported more than 200,000 people since 2018. Those assisted included 80,000 children.

One of the Orange Door network aims is that survivors don't have to re-tell their story to multiple services and repeatedly re-live the trauma of the abuse they have suffered. It also aims to ensure that families can be

connected with the services they need earlier, reducing the likelihood of longer-term, devastating impacts of family violence.

In 2021, ten Victorian women were murdered compared to 19 in 2020. The number of women murdered annually in Victoria has been decreasing every year since the Victorian Government started to implement the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. •

## COMMONWEALTH COMMITS FURTHER FUNDING TO PREVENT FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

**In the April 2021 JustAct we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government to address family and sexual violence further.**

On 7 January 2022, the Commonwealth Government announced \$65 million in funding to State and Territory Governments under the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence. The State and Territory Governments can use the funding to:

- expand crisis accommodation;
- provide increased support for survivors of sexual violence;
- provide legal support;
- fund interventions against perpetrators of family and sexual violence; and
- provide men's behaviour change programs.

On 6 March 2022, the Commonwealth Government announced

an additional \$189 million over five years to strengthen prevention and early intervention efforts to curb family, domestic and sexual violence. The funding included:

- An extra \$104 million over five years to the organisation Our Watch;
- \$48 million for a new campaign to confront the attitudes of some men which can condone or excuse violence; and
- \$32 million on consent education for children aged 12 and over and their parents.

In May 2020, we had also requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government asking that they provide reforms to protect people on temporary visas from family violence. The government responded by providing \$20 million over two years to grant up to \$3,000 in support of people on temporary visas that experience family violence. The funding also included \$7 million for nine Community and

Women's Legal Centres to provide legal and migration law assistance to people on temporary visas that experience family violence.

On 10 January 2022, the Commonwealth Government reported that more than 1,000 people and their families had received support from the funding.

In 2021, the Commonwealth Government awarded UnitingCare Australia the contract to deliver the Escaping Family Violence payment. The Escaping Violence Payment stated on 19 October 2021 and provided up to \$5,000 in assistance for people have experienced family or sexual violence. The support includes up to \$1,500 in cash assistance along with goods and services.

Thank you to everyone that wrote letters to the Commonwealth Government asking for additional funding to curb family and sexual violence. •



# VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT RELEASES FIRST PEOPLES YOUTH JUSTICE STRATEGY

**We invited you to write letters to the Victorian Government in October 2021 urging them to implement the recommendations of the ‘Our Youth, Our Way’ report written by the Commission for Children and Young People and the Koori Youth Justice Taskforce.**

There was good news, with the Victorian Government releasing ‘Wirkara Kulpa’, it’s Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, on 17 February 2022. The Aboriginal Justice Caucus led the development of the strategy with contributions from members of the Aboriginal Community, including Aboriginal children and young people. The focus of the

strategy is:

- to divert First Peoples children away from the youth justice system;
- protect cultural rights;
- increase the connection of young people to family, community and culture;
- support healing and rehabilitation; and
- work towards First People-led justice responses.

The ‘Wirkara Kulpa’ will address 56 of the recommendations made by the ‘Our Youth, Our Way’ report. The Victorian Government has supported 67 of the 75 recommendations made by the ‘Our Youth, Our Way’ report, with the other eight under review.

The ‘Wirkara Kulpa’ can be accessed from [www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/Aboriginal-youth-justice-strategy](http://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/Aboriginal-youth-justice-strategy).

The Victorian Government has stated that it is considering raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10-years-old to 12-years-old. While that would be a small step forward, it is short of the psychological evidence that the age of criminal responsibility should be set at 14-years-old.

The Victorian Government has reduced the daily average number of First Peoples children aged 10-17 under youth justice supervision by 42% between the 2016-2017 financial year and the 2020-2021 financial year. Victoria currently has the second-lowest rate of First Peoples children in youth justice custody or under youth justice supervision in Australia.

Thank you to everyone who wrote to the Victorian Government asking for youth justice reforms to benefit First Peoples’s children. •



# TRIAL BEGINS OF ISRAELI BORDER POLICE OFFICER FOR THE MURDER OF AUTISTIC PALESTINIAN



**In August 2020, we requested that you write letters for several Palestinians murdered by Israeli security forces. In such cases, it is extremely rare for Israeli security personnel to be held to account for the murder of a Palestinian.**

One of the cases we requested you write about was concerning the murder of Eyad al-Hallaq. On 30 May 2020, Israeli Border Police officers gunned down 32-year-old Eyad al-Hallaq, who was autistic. Eyad was from Wadi al-Joz in East Jerusalem and was on his way to the Elwyn Al Quds Centre for indi-

viduals with disabilities, which he attended daily.

In July 2020, the Israeli Justice Ministry said there was no video footage of the Border Police officers' interaction with Eyad before he was shot twice. However, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported there were no fewer than ten private and security cameras in the 150 meters between the Old City's Lions Gate, where the Border Police began to chase Eyad, and the garbage room where he was finally shot to death.

In October 2020, the Israeli Justice Ministry unit that investigated the shooting stated, "The deceased posed no danger to police and civilians in the area", and that the officer

who shot him did so against orders.

On 27 February 2022, the trial of the 20-year-old Israeli Border Police officer responsible for the murder began. Dozens of Israeli right-wing extremists, including a member of the Israeli parliament, Itamar Ben-Gvir, protested against the trial outside the Jerusalem District Court. The extremists called the accused murderer a "hero".

The next hearing in the trial will be held on 9 May 2022.

The commander of the officer that committed the murder has already been found not guilty of any crime.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters asking for the officer responsible for the murder of Eyad to be brought to justice. •

## LATEST TASMANIAN HOMELESSNESS FIGURES

**In February 2022, we requested Tasmanian supporters write to the Tasmanian Government urging more significant action to address homelessness and the housing shortage in Tasmania.**

In late February 2022, the Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TasCOSS) issued a public statement that the Tasmanian Government's

plans to build houses to address the homelessness problem will only deliver about one-third of the homes needed. TasCOSS stated that around 1,000 new homes are required every year for the next decade. The Tasmanian Government's current plans will deliver 3,500 new homes by 2027.

The Tasmanian Government plans to spend \$615 million on social and affordable housing and homelessness measures. The spending in-

cludes \$280 million for new houses for people in need.

As of the end of February, there were 4,349 Tasmanian households on the housing waiting list. On average, households on the list need to wait 71 weeks to access a home.

For Tasmanian supporters who have not yet had the chance to write a letter to the Tasmanian Government asking they take more action to address homelessness, it is not too late to do so. •



**On 4 March 2022, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) confirmed that governments around the world had agreed to strengthen the international standards to address money laundering.**

Money laundering allows human rights abusers, criminals, dictators

and tax evaders to profit from the ill-gotten gains of their activities. The JIM Cluster had made a submission to FATF in support of the strengthening of the anti-money laundering standards.

The new standards seek to make it harder for money-launderers to use front people to conceal that they are the owner of the funds being laundered. The standards require governments to have a public au-

thority to collect and hold information about the beneficial owners of funds and assets. In addition, governments must take steps to verify the beneficial ownership information.

The JIM Cluster will seek to ensure that the Australian Government implements the new standard promptly. •

## VICTORIAN GOV'T MAKES A SIGNIFICANT ANNOUNCEMENT ON OFFSHORE WIND GENERATION TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

**It is helpful to note when governments are addressing climate change.**

We need to continue to build on actions to curb the further harmful impacts of climate change. On 4 March 2022, there was good news

when the Victorian Government released the 'Victorian Offshore Wind Policy Directions Paper' that contained a commitment to seeing 2 GW of offshore wind power generated by 2032. That would be enough electricity to power 1.5 million homes. Further targets of 4 GW of offshore wind power has been

set for 2035 and 9 GW for 2040.

The Victorian Government stated that studies had shown that the state can support 13 GW of wind-generated electricity from coastal regions by 2050. That would be five times Victoria's current renewable energy generation. •

## AUSTRALIA LAGGING ON GOVERNMENT REVENUE

**The JIM Cluster has invited you to take part in several actions to encourage the Commonwealth Government to raise more revenue so that it can fund major services and support our community needs, such as mental health services, support**

**for survivors of family violence, ensuring the everyone has a roof over their heads and schools.**

Unfortunately, the latest OECD data on government revenue has shown that the Australian Government lags behind most wealthy countries.

The average tax to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio for OECD

countries increased to 33.5% for 2020. Australia's tax to GDP ratio was only 27.7%. The countries with the highest tax to GDP ratio were Denmark (46.5%), France (45.4%) and Belgium (43.1%).

Thank you to everyone who took action so far to encourage the Commonwealth Government to increase tax revenue to meet the essential needs of our communities. •