

JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND

News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

FEBRUARY 2026



GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES AN AI SAFETY INSTITUTE

In October 2025, we requested that you write letters to the Australian Government asking for measures to regulate the development of artificial intelligence (AI) to reduce the risks of harm.

One of the measures we requested that you ask for was the creation of an AI Safety Institute.

There was good news on 25 November, when the Australian Government¹ announced that it would establish an AI Safety Institute to

evaluate emerging AI capabilities, share information and support timely actions to address potential risks. The Institute will work across government to support best-practice regulation, advise on where updates to laws might be needed, and coordinate timely and consistent action to protect Australians.

The Government has stated that it will support the Institute's work to ensure AI companies are compliant with Australian laws and uphold

standards around fairness and transparency.

However, disappointingly, the government has rejected the need for laws to require the development of AI to be safe by design. Instead, the government hopes that tech corporations will comply with the Voluntary AI Safety Standard issued in 2024.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the October 2025 action.●

1 www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/timayres/media-releases/establishment-australian-ai-safety-institute



GOVERNMENT ACTION ON AI AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In October 2024, we requested that you write to the Commonwealth Government in support of measures to curb the increasing role that artificial intelligence (AI) is playing in facilitating online child sexual abuse.

One of the ways that AI is facilitating online child sexual abuse is through 'nudify' apps. Nudify apps can take a picture of a person, including a child, and strip off their clothing. In the case of children, the apps can be used to generate fake sexual images of children, and the fake images can be used for sexual extortion of the child. Such extortion can include coercing the child to provide real photos of themselves.

In early September 2025, the eSafety Commissioner warned a UK technology corporation about its nudify apps. The eSafety Commissioner stated that the corporation's nudify apps have approximately 100,000

Australian users per month and have been used to create sexually explicit deepfake images of Australian school children. The corporation has marketed its products as being able to undress "any girl", including schoolgirls. If it refused to act on the warning issued by the eSafety Commissioner, it could face a fine of up to \$49.5 million. In late November, the UK corporation agreed to block Australians from accessing its three websites that nudify images.

The Commonwealth Minister for Communications, Anika Wells, has promised that the government will consult on ways to restrict access to nudify apps.

The eSafety Commissioner has also publicly criticised technology corporations for failing to do enough to stop images of "the most heinous abuse of children, being tortured and raped" from being shared online.

In September 2025, the UK-based Internet Watch Foundation reported that it had discovered an AI chatbot website that had a legitimate front offering standard AI chat services, and a hidden section accessible only through specific links or pathways that generated child sexual abuse material. The dual nature allowed illegal content to exist on the open worldwide web whilst avoiding detection. The same URL displays either lawful or criminal material depending on how users access it. Accessing the same website via a particular digital pathway allows users to interact with multiple chatbots that will simulate 'abhorrent' sexual scenarios with children.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the JIM Cluster actions over the last decade to make the online world a safer place, including measures to prevent child sexual abuse facilitated online. ●

FROM THE JUSTICE & INTERNATIONAL MISSION CLUSTER

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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.



SURVEY FINDS PALM SCHEME WORKS FOR MOST WORKERS

Uniting Church congregations and members continue to provide pastoral and material support to people working on the PALM Scheme.

In December 2025, the World Bank and the Australian National University released the findings of face-to-face interviews with 200 workers and 15 employers on the PALM Scheme and the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme². The workers were from Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste. The survey team also met with village chiefs, church leaders and more than 200 families in the countries the workers came from.

A small minority of workers reported poor workplace and living conditions, with changes to the PALM Scheme having improved workers' conditions. Workers on the Scheme earn several times more than they could in their home country. The remittances they have sent home have paid for houses, school fees, solar panels, water tanks, satellite internet connections,

vehicles and household goods. The remittances have provided investments in land and small businesses such as taxi and car rental services, shops, commercial agriculture and catering ventures. In Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu, the researchers met with returned workers who were hiring local workers themselves, funding church renovations and supporting village projects. In Fiji, remittances had been pooled to purchase a school bus for 200 children from six villages. A Ni-Vanuatu community member put it simply: "Earning in Vanuatu is only for meals; if we want to build a house, labour mobility is the only way."

To reduce the social impacts of workers leaving their families behind in the Pacific Islands, there is a greater emphasis on preparing workers and their families for what the impacts will be. In Vanua Levu, Fiji, leaders from three villages have developed their own two-month, pre-departure training program that combines teamwork, goal-

setting and spiritual preparation for both workers and their families.

The researchers reported that the employers interviewed showed a genuine concern for their Pacific Island workforce and a willingness to invest in workers' wellbeing. Many of the employers had undertaken in-country recruitment themselves, building long-term relationships with workers' households and communities. Some have offered services and support beyond the schemes' requirements, including investments in dedicated health clinics, gyms, sporting facilities and places of worship to support workers' health and welfare while in Australia and New Zealand.

However, it was not all good news. The researchers heard that the PALM Scheme results in a loss of productive working-age men and women for agricultural production, communal activities, and recovery efforts following natural disasters. Recent estimates suggest that temporary labour mobility accounts for 15% of the working-age population in Tonga being overseas, 11% in Vanuatu and 2% in Fiji. ●

VICTORIAN FARM, REPORTED BY JIM CLUSTER, IS BEING PROSECUTED FOR WORKER UNDERPAYMENT



The JIM Cluster had made several reports to the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations against Bulmer Farms located in Lindenow, East Gippsland, which has been an employer on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme.

Several groups of workers reported to the JIM Cluster that, upon arriving from the Pacific Islands at the farm, they were illegally told they would be sacked and sent home if they joined a union while in Australia. More recently, a worker reported to the JIM Cluster that she had been forced to work unpaid overtime on the farm.

On 17 December 2025, the Fair Work Ombudsman announced

it had commenced legal action against the farm for allegedly underpaying 28 PALM Scheme workers more than \$645,000. There were \$8,964 in unlawful deductions from workers' pay for airfares, accommodation, and health insurance. It is alleged that 40% of the underpayment is related to unpaid overtime hours. Bulmer Farms also allegedly breached record-keeping and pay slip laws. The range of underpayment for individual workers ranged from \$1,500 to more than \$39,000. The alleged underpayments occurred between December 2019 and December 2023.

The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) stated that the scale of "the alleged underpayments of migrant workers by Bulmer

Farms across four years was entirely unacceptable, and we will be pursuing penalties to hold the company to account." The Farm faces penalties of up to \$93,000 per breach of the law.

Bulmer Farms conducted an internal review during the FWO investigation but made payments totalling only \$42,189 to workers it identified as underpaid.

Bulmer Farms issued a statement stating the underpayments were genuine mistakes, not intentional decisions. The PALM worker the JIM Cluster supported, who alleged she was subjected to underpaid overtime, told the Cluster she had raised the matter with the Farm, but it was not voluntarily corrected. ●

GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON DODGY MIGRATION AGENTS

In June 2024, we requested that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government urging reforms to address unethical migration agents who exploit people and file meritless asylum claims, clogging up the refugee and protection system for those who have legitimate claims. Thank you to everyone who

wrote letters in response to the action.

In mid-September 2025, the Commonwealth Government announced it had launched a major crackdown on unethical migration agents who had ripped off vulnerable visa applicants of more than \$1.4 million.

Four unethical migration agents operating from Victoria and

Queensland, but who were foreign citizens, have been removed from Australia. A further three were in the process of being removed from Australia. Between

them, the seven dodgy migration agents facilitated more than 470 protection visa claims, charging clients a cumulative \$1.422 million in fees. They knew the clients did not have valid asylum claims and would be refused refugee status. The investigation also identified potential links to organised crime syndicates. ●

NATIONAL LABOUR HIRE BUSINESS LICENSING SCHEME BLOCKED BY COALITION STATE GOVERNMENTS

In the October 2025 JustAct mailing, we requested that you write letters to the Australian Government urging that they proceed to develop a national system for licensing labour hire businesses to assist in curbing the exploitation of workers by such businesses.

who wrote to the government, revealing that the Coalition state governments in Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory oppose a national approach to licensing labour hire businesses. That is, even though Queensland already has

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the action.

The Assistant Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Patrick Gorman, has replied to people

an effective labour hire business licensing system.

The letter from Assistant Minister Gorman states that the Commonwealth Government will work with the Labor state governments in Victoria, NSW, WA, SA and ACT to consider ways to achieve a consistent approach to labour hire regulation across states and territories, including through model laws.

The Victorian labour hire business licensing scheme has helped to curb the exploitation of people working on temporary visas. In the 2024-2025 financial year, the Victorian Labour Hire Authority refused to grant licences to over 100 businesses seeking to operate as labour hire businesses to prevent worker exploitation. ●



VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE CALLS FOR ELECTION REFORM

In August 2025, we issued a postcard campaign calling for an end to the Group Voting Ticket system in Victoria, which allows parties in the Legislative Council to decide where a voter's preferences will be directed, rather than what the voter prefers.

At the start of December 2025, the Victorian Parliamentary Electoral Matters Committee recommended that the Parliament do away with the Group Voting Ticket system and allow voters to assign where they want their votes to go when voting above the line in

the Legislative Council election. The Legislative Council is the Victorian upper house of the parliament.

Thank you to everyone who sent postcards calling for Victorian electoral reform. ●



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS TO PREVENT VULNERABLE CHILDREN FROM ENTERING THE YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In the October 2025 JustAct mailing, we requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government urging them to provide support to prevent vulnerable children from entering the youth criminal justice system. Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the action.

There was good news in mid-November 2025 with the Victorian Government announcing \$19.8 million to establish a new Violence Reduction Unit. It will focus on crime prevention measures and on working with schools, hospitals, employers, and mental health services. The first Violence Reduction Unit set up in an OECD country was in Glasgow in 2005. It has been credited with a 60% reduction in violent crime in that city. London also adopted the approach in 2018. It is seen as responsible for a 31% drop in homicides and a 28% drop in

knife crime in London. A UK study found that Violence Reduction Units had prevented more than 3,000 hospital admissions for violent injury in England and Wales.

One of the Unit's actions will be to place social workers in 20 targeted schools to intervene early in the lives of children at risk of coming into contact with the youth criminal justice system. Data for the almost 70 children who have been implicated in two or more serious offences, such as aggravated home invasion, found 70% had disengaged from school before they became involved in crime. The Violence Reduction Unit will aim to keep children connected to schools.

As part of the work of the Violence Reduction Unit, the Victorian Government will provide \$7.7 million to the organisation 16 Yards³ that provides mentoring services to vulnerable children. The mentors

themselves were once troubled youths or sentenced youth offenders who have turned their lives around. They've undergone specialised training and personal development. They've combined that with their lived experience and now guide other children through the same change.

Negatively, the Victorian Government has also given in to *The Herald Sun* campaign to follow the Queensland State Government and sentence children to long prison terms for violent crimes with the passing of the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Act 2025* in December. It removes the established principle of detention as a last resort, and instead prioritises prisons as punishment over rehabilitation, increases the likelihood of harsher sentencing, and reduces the likelihood that children will be able to integrate back into the community. ●



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES HUMAN RIGHTS WORK

The Synod provided \$21,000 to the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), South Luzon Jurisdictional Area, for the human rights work they conducted in 2025.

The work of the UCCP led to false charges against a UCCP

member being dropped in April 2025. As part of the UCCP's human rights work, staff visited three political prisoners.

Unfortunately, as the JIM Cluster is unaware of any Synod congregations with an ongoing interest in the work of the UCCP,

and as there is strong interest in the Synod supporting peace-building work in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Synod has reduced funding to the UCCP for 2026 to \$5,000.

The reduction has freed up funds to go to organisations working on non-violent peace building in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Congregations or members who are interested in supporting this work within the UCCP are welcome to contact the JIM Cluster for more information on how to get involved.●

JIM CLUSTER ACTIONS FROM 2025

Annually, we survey you, our supporters, about which actions you would like us to resource you to take action on.

Below is a table showing how many actions we issued for each of the areas you requested that we resource you to do so. The issues are in the order of preference from the survey results.●

Issue	Total number of actions issued in 2025
Curbing Homelessness	4
Justice for First Peoples	3
Curbing Family Violence	3
Refugees and people seeking asylum	2
Curbing Climate Change	5
Ending Racism	2
Modern slavery/ online safety	4
Peace in Israel-Palestine	6
Support for people with disability	2
Gambling reform	1
Democratic reform	2
Reform of the youth criminal justice system	1
Peace-building (Myanmar, West Papua)	1
Curbing the arms trade	1



“MORAL AMBITION” (2025) AND “HUMANKIND: A HOPEFUL HISTORY” (2020) BY RUTGER BREGMAN

For those who need a boost to see humanity in a more positive light, Rutger Bregman’s writing will be welcome reading.

In his 2020 work, “Humankind: A Hopeful History,” Bregman argues that humanity is hardwired for kindness, geared towards cooperation rather than competition, and more inclined to trust than distrust one another. He argues that humanity should be regarded as *Homo puppy*, a friendly species, rather than the neoliberal *Homo economicus*, a species of individuals who act only to maximise selfish gain.

He provides many examples of real-world situations and experiments that back his view that we are basically kind. Hatred and violence between us usually need to be fostered. He provides an example from 1965: six Tongan boys were stranded on an island from June 1965 to September 1966, when they were rescued by an Australian ship. Unlike the bleak novel *Lord of the Flies*, the boys cooperated and established a food garden, a water storage system, a badminton court, chicken pens and a permanent fire.

Bregman concluded his book with suggestions for living a more ethical, compassionate, and loving life. He lamented that

modern psychologists have discovered that when people do something out of the goodness of their hearts, they often fabricate selfish motives. He argued that:

By cloaking your good deeds, you place them in quarantine, where they can’t serve as an example for others. And that’s a shame, because Homo puppy’s secret superpower is that we’re so great at copying one another.

He suggests we should follow Jesus’ advice from the Sermon on the Mount not to blow our own trumpet, while at the same time letting our “light shine before others, so that they may see your good works...”

Bregman’s subsequent work, “Moral Ambition: Stop Wasting Your Talent and Start Making a Difference”, is a call for us to consider how we are using the lives we have. His book argued that we need to go beyond not causing harm, stating that when one focusses on the negative, “A good life is then primarily defined by what you don’t do. Don’t fly. Don’t eat meat. Don’t have kids. And whatever you do, don’t even think about using a plastic straw.”

Instead, he urged, “One would hope that on your deathbed, you can chalk up your life’s work to more than simply all the harm you didn’t cause”

“People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.”

- Allen Raine, writer, 1836 - 1908

Bregman urged readers to take social justice campaigning seriously by engaging meaningfully with people. He was critical of the belief that posting on social media can make a profound difference: “Modern protest sometimes seems little more than a collection of

clicks and likes, in the hope that someone higher up will take notice.”

The book contains a lot of advice on how to be more effective in changing the world for the better. For example, Bregman argued that seeking to work only with people you find ideologically pure shuts out many potential allies.

Bregman acknowledges the need for structural change to make the world a more socially just place. Bregman finished the book by urging the reader to “See the good in others; demand more of yourself.”●

