

JUST ACT

ACT WITH JUSTICE IN MIND



News & resources from the Justice and International Mission Cluster

JUNE 2026



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

In February 2026, we requested that you write letters to the Victorian Government about greater support for students with disability in Victorian schools and greater protection from harms.

There was good news in the May 2026 Victorian Government budget with the announcement of \$2.2 billion to support students with disability.

The funding is aimed at:

- Improved accessibility;
- Employment of additional specialist staff; and,
- Training to teachers to better support students with disability.

Part of the funding supports special, individualised care for students with high and complex needs.

The funding also supports Inclusion Outreach Coaches, based at disability specialist schools, who provide support and advice to school leaders

and teachers at mainstream schools. (www.schools.vic.gov.au/inclusion-outreach-coaching)

The funds include:

- \$39 million to ensure that students are being transported to disability specialist schools for free; and,
- \$23 million for free, high-intensity Outside School Hours Care at 31 disability specialist schools.

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



FURTHER SAFEGUARDS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

The JIM Cluster has requested over several years that you write letters to the Commonwealth Government seeking increased safeguards to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability.

There was good news on 1 April 2026 with the Federal Parliament passing the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Integrity and Safeguarding) Act 2026*. The new law:

- Strengthens the penalty framework, ensuring fit-for-purpose penalties to deter people and disability service providers on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) from providing poor quality and unsafe services and supports;
- Ensures that unsuitable people can be excluded from providing services in the NDIS by adding categories of people against whom a banning order can be imposed;
- Restricts people from engaging in unethical promotions that relate to the NDIS. Such promotions often result in people with disability on the NDIS being exploited; and,
- Strengthens the ability of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to obtain information from disability service providers on the NDIS.

The JIM Cluster had made a submission to a Senate Committee inquiry into the Bill.

Thank you to everyone who has taken action to support greater safeguards against abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability.

REFUGEE WEEK RESOURCES



The Refugee Council of Australia has released resources for Refugee Week 2026, which runs from 14 to 20 June.

They can be downloaded from: refugeeweek.org.au

The available resources include:

- Resource kits for organisations, educators and community leaders;
- Posters;
- Stories of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam;
- Graphic design materials; and,
- Factsheets.

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT INCREASED SUPPORT FOR PACIFIC ISLAND WORKERS

There was good news on 1 April 2026 with the Commonwealth Government announcing it was lifting its contribution for job-specific training for PALM workers from 40% to 60% and doubling the subsidy per worker from \$300 to \$600 annually.

The JIM Cluster has partnered with you and rural congregations across Victoria and Tasmania to seek increased support and protection for people from the Pacific Islands who come to work in Australia under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALM). Thank you to everyone who has supported this campaign.

“We are responding and listening to the priorities of the Pacific and Timor-Leste to ensure training and skills development is a central feature of the PALM Scheme”, said Minister for Pacific Islands Affairs, Pat Conroy. “This funding will enhance opportunities for PALM workers to gain skills they can deploy to make a positive contribution to their communities when they return home.”

Subsidised training includes courses in:

- Forklift operation;
- Safe food handling;
- Chemical safety; and,
- Working safely at heights.

Since late 2023, the Commonwealth Government has provided more than \$500,000 in funding to subsidise training for workers on the PALM Scheme.

There was also good news at the end of March with the Fijian Government announcing that in the last year, people from Fiji working temporarily in Australia and New Zealand had sent back \$630 million in remittances to their families. The Fijian Government said that the money sent back to Fiji helped families pay for “household expenses, education, housing, healthcare and small business investment.”



MEASURES TO TACKLE DODGY MIGRATION AGENTS IMPLEMENTED



In June 2024, we requested that you write to the Commonwealth Government asking for measures to deal with unethical migration agents that exploit people seeking asylum and migrants. Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the action.

The number of staff working for the body that oversees migration agents, the Office of Migration Agents Registration Authority, has been tripled since 2022. In the last year, they issued penalties against 14 migration agents, bringing the total to 61 since the middle of 2022.

Unethical behaviour has included providing false information on visa applications and unlawfully charging applicants for their employers' sponsorship costs.

In mid-March 2026, new measures came into effect to improve the system's integrity. Migration agents will have to undertake yearly ethics training and regular refreshers.

MARK ZIRNSAK APPOINTED CIVIL SOCIETY CO-CHAIR TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT BODY TO PROMOTE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT



On 8 May, the Commonwealth Government announced that Senior Social Justice Advocate, Dr Mark Zirnsak, would be the civil society co-chair for the Open Government Forum.

The Forum is a core component of Australia's participation in the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative that promotes open government and public sector integrity.

An equal number of government and civil society representatives will participate in the Forum.

The Forum plays an important leadership role in advancing open government reform. Civil society members will work in partnership with government members to develop, implement and monitor Australia's Fourth Open Government National Action Plan, which will build on the important work delivered under [Australia's Third National Action Plan 2024 – 2025](#).

AI HARMS CONTINUE TO BE DISCLOSED

In April 2026, a meeting was organised jointly by the World Association for Christian Communication, the World Council of Churches, the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, and Brot für die Welt to discuss opportunities for advocacy on digital justice and AI accountability.

The meeting discussed the lack of accountability among a few major technology corporations currently advancing AI solutions without broad consultation with the general public. The meeting identified three areas for digital justice and AI accountability: advocacy in international and national spaces; building critical thinking through existing and new educational resources and methodologies; and ensuring continued cross-sectoral networking.

The World Council of Churches moderator, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, told the meeting, “The speediness of these developments is such that we cannot simply think we will take another two years to reflect and then come up with something. I believe we all agree this is so important and so urgent that we need to be much, much faster, and I do hope we can be successful in this.”

The increasing threats of harm and negative impacts from artificial intelligence (AI) continue to be publicly disclosed. These include:

- AI chatbots encouraging teenagers and adults to take their own lives or carry out violent acts;
- That Claude Mythos Preview, an unreleased AI model built by US corporation Anthropic, was too dangerous to release publicly as it can find and exploit flaws in

software at an unprecedented speed and scale, which could lead to mass data breaches;

- AGL has warned that a surge in electricity demand from data centres needed by AI tools could outstrip forecasts. Data centres in Australia already use as much electricity as 900,000 homes; and,
- Gartner Legal and Compliance Practice in the US estimates that in 2026, AI will be responsible for over 2,000 deaths worldwide.

You can encourage family, friends or members of your congregation or faith group to sign the postcards we have produced, urging that the Australian Government put in place measures to curb AI harms. Additional postcards can be ordered by emailing jim@victas.uca.org.au





SUPPORTER PROFILE:

JENNE PERLSTEIN

I live on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country (Kulin Nations) in Brunswick East and am involved at Brunswick Uniting Church, focused on First Nations justice.

Raised working-class in Pascoe Vale South and educated in public schools, I first encountered the church through the Baptist Sunday School. I was baptised at 13 and shaped by a fear-based theology. My faith later broadened through liberation theology and socially engaged Christian communities, such as House of the Gentle Bunyip, Baptist Social Justice, Fitzroy Uniting and the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM).

My political formation grew alongside my spirituality. My father—ALP stalwart, Mayor of Coburg, unionist and human-rights advocate—taught me to link politics with dignity for working and marginalised people. I joined Young Labor at 14, held local leadership roles, and was shaped by the Whitlam era, including meeting Gough and Marg Whitlam, and several Ministers such as local MP Gordon Bryant, who served as Aboriginal Affairs Minister.

I started studying Medicine at the University of Melbourne, then completed postgraduate

Social Work at La Trobe. The shift reflected personal, family, and medical training pressures, as well as my desire for social justice and societal change. My work has included support in aged care, disability, dementia, complex childhood trauma and mental health education, sometimes drawing on medical training.

University also widened my horizons. Via a friend there, I attended a progressive Catholic student Mass for several years, which challenged my assumptions and connected me with a justice-minded community, Common Ground www.common-ground.org.au. Common Ground is an intentional community that strengthened my commitments to environmental care, respect for First Peoples, and non-violent conflict resolution.

At La Trobe, ASCM became a spiritual home where faith, feminism, anti-racism and LGBTQI+ inclusion belonged together. I helped organise the ASCM Anti-Racism Conference (1988–89), coordinating Aboriginal speakers and workshops on racism awareness. First Peoples mentors like Gary Foley and Robbie Thorpe, who spoke at the conference, were confronting and formative.

Joining the 1988 Anti-Bicentennial protests in Sydney deepened my commitment. Other 1980s activism included the Koori Information Centre, peace and anti-uranium work (Roxby Downs blockade), 3CR, and Latrobe Student Representative Council student representative roles opposing fees.

After leaving home in my 20s in difficult circumstances, I moved beyond fundamentalist evangelical Christianity and questioned conventional “mission” models.

I found wider spiritual homes such as earth-based Goddess spirituality, Jungian psychology, esoteric studies and Buddhist participation, before converting to Reform Judaism in 2003, supported by Jewish ancestry (Great Grandfather Isidore ‘Leschinski’ Perlstein) and a lifelong sense of Jewish identity.

My interfaith path deepened through the Parliament of the World’s Religions and the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary in New York (2014–15) course. www.1spirit.org. I felt I had arrived ‘home’ with the theology and teachings that embraced all faiths and strongly emphasised social justice.

Through some changes at the synagogue I attended, the practicalities of distance and community connection, I became more closely involved with Brunswick Uniting Church. I maintain a core Jewish identity, continuing to mark major Jewish religious events, but overarched by an interspiritual stance.

Community is my lifeblood— healing, sustaining, and essential for cohesion and conflict reduction.

As someone without a partner or children, I'm mindful of inclusion and how "solo" people can be overlooked.

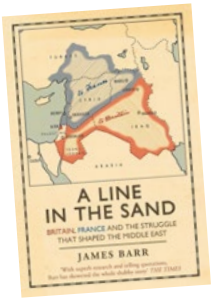
The social justice issue that occupies me most is First Peoples' rights—what I see as a foundational injustice in Australia. I have been an ally for around 50 years, guided by mentors who emphasise that allyship requires trust, deep listening, relationship, and persistence. As examples of this allyship, I have spent a decade on the ANTaR Victoria Committee (four years as co-chair) and ten years with Moreland ANTaR. I helped run Treaty forums in 2025 and led the "Yes" campaign in Wills for the 2023 referendum on a Voice to Parliament. In 2007 I received

the Victoria Labor Lisa Bellar Award for Reconciliation. Locally, I'm active in First Nations Justice Merri-bek and in the First Nations Focus group at Brunswick Uniting Church. Twenty-five years on the Victorian ALP Aboriginal Affairs Policy Committee (eight as Chair) has highlighted policy and advocacy areas that need to be pursued. I have tutored in the Indigenous people's subject at the University of Melbourne Master of Social Work for 6 years, invited to do so by an Indigenous friend and Elder.

My wider justice commitments include women's rights, interfaith work, and the rights and safety of both Jewish and Palestinian peoples. My ethics draw on a Judeo-Christian foundation, enriched by Buddhist and Hindu influences. Recent events in Israel–Palestine have deepened my reflection: I hold a human-rights, peace and anti-war stance, recognise the historical weight of the Holocaust and the longing for Jewish safety, and feel distress at Palestinian oppression, anti-Muslim attitudes, the massacre at Bondi and the contested boundary between legitimate critique of Israel and antisemitism.

I believe the church should have a public voice in justice because our ethics call us to peace and responsibility—captured in the Torah's call to "pursue justice" and in Jesus' prophetic challenge to hypocrisy and oppression.

For me, spirituality and inner work belong with activism. Justice and compassion must be lived outwardly, while inner transformation helps reshape both society and self.



BOOK REVIEW:

'A LINE IN THE SAND: BRITAIN, FRANCE AND THE STRUGGLE THAT SHAPED THE MIDDLE EAST', JAMES BARR (2011)

James Barr's "A Line in the Sand" provides a detailed analysis of how the British and French Empires from 1915 to 1949 played a significant role in generating and exacerbating the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Agents and diplomats of both the British and French Empires lied to, manipulated, and exploited Arabs, Palestinians and Jews as they battled each other for imperial control over the lands that are now Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Israel and Palestine. Barr's work is a strong reminder of the harm colonial empires have caused in our world.

The British Government and its colonial agents used the Zionist cause at times in their struggle with the French Empire. They further fuelled tensions between Palestinians and Jews by supporting or restricting Jewish emigration to Palestine. Jews were largely restricted from emigrating to most European countries and the US when fleeing widespread persecution in Europe, making Palestine a key refuge. The British Government allowed for Jewish migration to Palestine when they needed Jewish support for their interests, and shut down such migration when they were seeking to manipulate Palestinians and Arabs to support their interests.

In May 1916, the British and French Empires reached a secret agreement to carve up the Middle East between them if they defeated the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The British would get Jordan and Iraq, while the French would get Lebanon and Syria.

Palestine would be under international control. The ink on the agreement was barely dry, and both Empires began looking for ways to undermine it and gain an advantage.

To manipulate Arabs into fighting against Ottoman troops, the British made promises of an independent pan-Arab state that they abandoned after the war was won.

To ward off French claims that Palestine should be under international administration, the British foreign secretary, Lord Balfour, on 7 November 1917, made a public declaration to Lord Rothschild that the British would "favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for Jewish people". However, as Lord Asquith pointed out, the British prime minister, Lloyd George, "does not care a damn for the Jews or their past or their future" but was motivated by keeping the French out of Palestine and avoiding a loss to his personal prestige if the British Empire had to give up Palestine. The French Government did not believe anyone would be so stupid as to pursue a policy that was bound to amplify hatred between Arabs and Jews, as "it would, for a very thin profit, provoke serious difficulties."

After the end of the First World War, the northern border of Palestine, which was under British occupation, was set to prevent bombers from reaching the Suez Canal from the north.

US Administrations under Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt tried to pressure the British and French Empires to allow the Arab peoples to have self-determination and independence. Although this did not stop US Administrations making

sure their corporations got a share of Iraq's oil being exploited by the French and British Empires.

Barr outlines the brutality of the French and British Empires in crushing local opposition to their imperial control. Examples are the French pulverising a revolt by the Druze people in Syria in 1925 – 1927 and the British crushing a Palestinian revolt in 1936 to 1938. The British used tactics to quash Palestinian fighters that they had developed in trying to crush Irish Republicans. In addition, they blew up the homes of families of Palestinian fighters. They also seized Palestinians to be 'mine detectors', often murdering them when they had finished with them.

However, as the outbreak of the Second World War approached, the British Government decided they needed to avoid Palestinians and Arabs supporting the German Nazi Regime, so they blocked Jewish migration to Palestine. The British Government believed the Jews would have no choice but to support them.

During the Second World War, French officials under de Gaulle's Free French supplied arms and money to the Zionist terrorist organisation the Stern Gang. The Stern Gang opposed British attempts to oust French influence in Syria and Lebanon and create a greater Arab Federation. As part of this opposition, two Zionist terrorists murdered the British minister of state, Lord Moyne, in Cairo on 6 November 1944.

For anyone interested in the harmful role of colonial empires in our current world and the complexity of the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "A Line in the Sand" is a must-read.