

Annual Just Peace Annual Report to AGM 2017

December 13, 2017

Co-Convenors Annette Brownlie and Ross Gwyther

Introduction:

It is more than 16 years since a small group of people gathered in the office of the Miscellaneous Works Union to decide how to build an organisation responding to the aggressive military US-declared “war on terror”. Whilst there were literally hundreds of individual voices in the community crying out for a measured and just response to the twin-towers tragedy, rather than further bombing and destruction, there was no organised way for these voices to be heard. Out of that situation was born Just Peace in Brisbane.

The world, and Australia, has changed considerably since that time. The killing has continued and intensified. Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya – the list of tragedies has unfolded with a seemingly endless inevitability. On the face of it the peace and anti-war movement worldwide has been impotent. Rallies of millions in the lead up to the Iraq invasion had seemingly no effect. Peace movements organised and active in virtually every country have had little effect on government policies.

The main political parties, the business leaders and media barons may be calling the shots at present. Yet at the grass roots we in Just Peace do see a slow but significant change. We have talked with everyday people – for example to Rotary meetings, to Church groups, to workers gathered in trade union meetings – and sense a mood of disquiet at the involvement of our young men and women in wars far away that lead only to further terror and tragedy.

Political change may be slow and imperceptible. But at some point it becomes unstoppable.

The strategy of our Just peace organising group has been threefold.

Firstly we have worked to provide a ready and accessible source of reliable alternative information for people dissatisfied with the endless slanted “news” and infotainment provided by the Murdoch media. To that end we have a regular journal “The Peace Issue” edited by Adrian Pollock, and a series of public meetings on topics of interest.

Secondly we have cooperated with other organisations which have some similar aims to those of Just peace. In particular, Just Peace is a member of the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network (APAN), the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA), the International Campaign to ban Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), and the International Peace Bureau (IPB). We also worked with the Griffith Asia Institute (GAI) on organising a public lecture by Ramesh Thakur. Details of these activities are included later in this report

Thirdly we have helped to build an Australia wide network of groups and organisations around the aim of developing a truly independent and peaceful Australian foreign policy – the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN). Whilst this has required a considerable input of time and energy from Just peace members, as well as active members of other IPAN affiliates around the country, this work is bearing fruit. We are moving towards the situation where IPAN is the respected and authoritative voice in Australian public dialogue on foreign and defence policy issues.

Just Peace has maintained a stable membership of about 100 over the past year. However our strategy outlined above has led to connections with a much broader cross-section of the community. Our financial situation remains sound, with membership affiliations often accompanied by donations from members and supporters. Our sub-committee Just Peace for Palestine has been active in a number of ways this year, and convenor Vikki Henry has prepared a report for this AGM.

We have lost three of our close friends in Just Peace this past year. One of the original Just Peace organising group, Jim Sharp, passed away in November and committee members Willy Bach and Frances Kendall passed away earlier in the year. We wish their family and friends our warm regards - their commitment and passion for a better world will be missed by many of us.

Activities during 2017

January – the Brisbane IPAN groups met to discuss planning activity for 2017. Representatives from WILPF, Quakers, Just Peace, Western Suburbs Ecumenical Group and individuals participated.

February- Ross and Annette were the delegates to the IPAN Strategy planning meeting over the weekend of 4/5th in Sydney. Delegates were there from NT, NSW, VIC, ACT and QLD. Strategic approaches to IPAN goals were formulated. IPAN has established itself as a respected peak peace body through being active visible and accountable.

March Just Peace forum Donald Trump and the Decline of US Empire A presentation by Barrister Stephen Hegedus.

March in March- Just Peace assisted with the organising of this rally for social justice, peace and a safe and sustainable environment. Over 500 people participated and Just Peace had a stall where we launched the **Move our Money campaign** designed to encourage community dialogue on how much of our precious taxes are spent on wars as part of our subservient relationship to the USA.

April Logan Rotary invited Just Peace representatives to talk about the need for Australia to develop peace-promoting foreign policies.

Palm Sunday Rally to End the Wars and bring Refugees here. MAPW (Medical Association for the Prevention of War) Brisbane representative Dr Danielle Viliunas acted as MC and Just Peace Convenor Ross Gwyther addressed the gathering of around 500 people along with speakers from the Refugee Action Collective and the Muslim community as well as Anglican Dean of Brisbane Rev Dr Peter Catt.. The march ended in St John's Cathedral with Rev Catt addressing that gathering.. A very successful event!

Anzac Eve Peace Vigil- this was the 3rd year we have held this lantern vigil to shine a light of the need to prevent war and to recognise the resistance of the 1st peoples of Australia to occupation by the British colonists. Aboriginal Elder Sam Watson gave an informative talk on the memorial art work created by Fiona Foley at the law courts in Roma St. Paul Guard whose parents died on MH 370 over Ukraine spoke on the tragedy of his family's loss and humanities loss through war. David Bradbury filmed the Anzac event and with some financial support he has provided us with a short film available on Youtube

April Film Festival, organised in collaboration with Magda Artz at Rainworth, screened *The Coming War with China* John Pilger's film, along with David Bradbury's latest, *The Darkest Hour* and Larry Zetlin's, *Hell No We Wont Go*.

May-The public call to Keep Australia out of US Wars led to over 4000 people signing the IPAN statement published in The Saturday Paper on May 6th.

May Day was celebrated again in Brisbane with 30 000 thousand unionist and supporters marching. Just Peace had a stall at the exhibition grounds.

Just Peace held a forum led by Mike Henry to evaluate what we have learnt and achieved over the past five years, leading to some useful insights and planning for the future.

Annette and Ross talked to a regular members meeting of the Maritime Union about Just Peace and IPAN. The union voted unanimously for their Qld branch to affiliate with IPAN, and for their organiser Paul Petersen to be an ongoing contact for Just Peace

Al Nakba rally in May - Just Peace 4 Palestine Convenor Vikki Henry spoke as over 2000 Palestinian prisoners in Israel continued their hunger strike.

UNAA Qld Branch Just Peace has 2 representatives on the committee, Vikki Henry and Annette Brownlie. A seminar was held early in the year looking at the UN's sustainability goals. Very interesting with town planners discussing the good and the bad in relation to environmental sustainability.

UN Peacekeepers Day 27th May- Just Peace marched with our banner along with UNAA Young Professionals, Members of communities who have direct experience of peacekeeping in their countries of origin.

July-U3A Just Peace members Ross Gwyther and Annette Brownlie were invited to hold sessions during the U3A Winter School on the need for Australia to adopt peaceful independent foreign policies and the history of opposition to the Vietnam War.

A 6 week U3A Peace Studies course in July/ August was directed by Just Peace committee member Anita Read, with input from a number of Just Peace members.

13th July the UNAA Q, Just Peace, and the Griffith Asia Institute co-organised a public forum at Griffith University at which Prof Ramesh Thakur spoke in his capacity as UNAA Ambassador for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, to celebrate the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the ICAN campaign, and to highlight the ongoing struggle for nuclear disarmament.

In September the annual IPAN conference was held in Melbourne over the weekend of 8/9th with 200 people attending and valuable speakers from Australia US Korea Diego Garcia and NZ. The presentations are all available on the IPAN web site- Just Peace members are on the committee of IPAN playing a very active role in developing this alternative national voice for non violent resolution of conflict and for Australia to take a place on the world stage as an advocate for a just and sustainable future for all.

The Brisbane International Day of Peace Lecture Thursday September 21st was a great success. Historian Henry Reynolds delivered this year's lecture attracting around 200 people along. The lecture was shared on Big Ideas RN and Henry did radio interviews on 612 as well as Murri Radio 98 FM. This event established 6 years ago has taken hold as a key Brisbane event and has potential to develop along the lines of the Sydney Peace prize. Next year Thomas Kennealy will deliver the lecture.

On **October 7th** the **Brisbane Rally for Peace** was held on the 16th anniversary of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' which became Operation enduring war. This was an international day to focus on the wars which followed the World trade centre attack but in fact was a continuation of the middle east wars waged by the US since WW2. Again some great speakers all available to view on the Just Peace Facebook page. This rally re-established the more than 35 year tradition of an annual rally for peace and nuclear disarmament in Brisbane. A big thank you to Taylor, Rebecca and Mike for the videoing and to Taylor for her MC-ing at the Rally for Peace.

On 2nd October Just Peace hosted an internet hookup for the annual general meeting of IPAN. We held the meeting at the offices of Thoughtworks, with the kind assistance of staff member Nic Smythe.

In November Just Peace held a fundraising luncheon at the West End Gardens. We enjoyed two very interesting talks – one by Paul Guard about the importance of peaceful resolution of international conflicts, and a talk by Liz Elliott about the need for a new economic and political structure for our society if we are to move towards a more peaceful and just world. Thirty seven people attended and enjoyed a delicious food and great company – as well as helping to raise close to \$500.

Also in November, Just peace joined with WILPF and UNAA to promote a film about the environmental consequences of war, "Sacred Lands and Wounded Lives". A number of Just Peace members are in the Combined Unions Choir, and travelled to Warwick early in November to participate in a major re-enactment of the famous egg throwing incident in 1917, when Prime Minister Billy Hughes travelled the country to promote his ultimately unsuccessful attempt to introduce conscription, and found resistance wherever he went - including a local man tossing an egg at him at the Warwick railway platform..

Looking Forwards:

Most of us who are active in Just Peace will have had family or friends tell us that "you are wasting your time –you will not change anything!" Indeed the more cynical amongst them will point us to that old aphorism about the definition of insanity, namely "doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result"! To some extent there is an element of truth in that sort of critique of ongoing campaigns of activism. Every

so often we need to review the work we are carrying out and evaluate if we are achieving enough of the outcomes we are working towards.

Do we carry on as before? Do we drastically alter our strategies and activities? Is it time to fold up altogether and move on? Answering these questions objectively is made even more difficult by the special camaraderie and spirit amongst those of us who work closely together in difficult political struggles, of which the peace movement is undoubtedly a prime example!

In the issues of concern to Just Peace, the world is in an even more dangerous and unstable situation than it was 16 years ago. Successive Australian governments have made no significant steps towards a more peaceful policy based on dialogue and diplomacy. Where do we go as a community organisation over the next few years?

There are some very strong grounds for arguing that Just Peace members redouble our efforts at recruiting others and building public dialogue. Whenever our members have addressed larger gatherings of community members, we have had a mostly encouraging and positive response. At large and small groups of people enrolled in U3A classes, at church gatherings, at trade union meetings of rank and file members – at all of these occasions we have sensed a mood of disquiet amongst everyday people about the directions in which our Governments are taking us. That mood is of course mirrored in the huge response that the Sanders and Corbyn campaigns have received, particularly from young people, in the US and the UK. It is probably also mirrored in the growing vote for parties other than the “big two” in Australian Federal and State politics.

We have some hard questions to talk over and decide collectively, for example:

- How do we develop a larger collective of active members?
- How do we connect more closely with those people’s movements which have concerns in common but are focussed on their own struggles, such as the environment movement or the refugee support movement?
- How do we connect more closely with those large community organisations which include the majority of the people, and also share some of our concerns, such as the churches and the trade unions.
- How do we develop a strategy which makes political parties sit up and take notice?
- How do we connect with the growing restlessness of young people, in the face of an increasingly uncaring and unequal society?

As we in Just Peace see it, the people’s mood is shifting, even if slowly. It is up to grass roots groups such as Just Peace to help with that shift towards a fairer, more just and more peaceful Australia.