

JUST PEACE AGM 2008

October 19th

Ahimsa House

Welcome everyone to the 7th Just Peace AGM. Seven very busy years as reading of past AGM reports attests. This past year was no exception.

2007 in the lead up to the federal election saw exceptional energy expended, with activity such as *'Australia at the Crossroads- A new direction'* working with many peace and justice groups, unions and individuals to end the Howard years. Total disregard for dealing with global warming and climate change and 10 years of regression, in working conditions, human rights, indigenous rights, a shameful foreign policy, leading us to wage war on the poor and weakly armed nations of Afghanistan and Iraq with horrendous consequences.....

- Over 2 million people have been displaced from their homes in Iraq mostly into Jordan and Syria with another 1.4 million displaced internally
- Conservative figures from Iraq Body Count estimate 100,000 people have died in Iraq, with The first Hopkins study published in the Lancet estimating of 98,000 "excess deaths" (deaths above the pre-2003 mortality rate) had occurred in the 18 month period from March 2003 to September 2004. The second Hopkins study estimated that 655,000 excess deaths had occurred from March 2003 through June 2006. Shocking figures!
- Australian foreign policy appearing to our regional neighbours to echo that of the USA.
- Joining the extremely provocative *Proliferation Security Initiative* with the US and other nations outside of the UN framework, threatening to intercept North Korean vessels on the high sea.
- Agreeing to host expansion of the Missile Defence Shield otherwise known as the 'Star Wars' programme, with Robert Hill and Alexander Downer signing an historic Memorandum of Understanding in 2004 allowing for further US bases and MDS facilities to be established here.
- Since that time the Talisman Sabre military exercises at Shoalwater Bay have been held with 26 000 US and Australian troops training to improve 'Interoperability' in war scenarios.

Australia now has a token number of troops stationed in Iraq as a result of the Rudd Government decision to withdraw its forces from Iraq, for which we applaud. However we have serious concerns (as outlined in the letter to the PM) about our increased troop commitment to the war in Afghanistan. Just last week the British military commander Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith stated he didn't think the war in Afghanistan was "winnable". Joel Fitzgibbon agreed with him and yet announced the deployment of more Australians with a greater role in front line fighting.

Interoperability means our hardware and military strategies work hand in glove with US forces and have in essence led to Australia becoming a division of the US military.....and this is where we remain!

The US economic collapse threatens people's livelihoods around the world- it certainly is time for a new direction! However apart from the effects on ordinary people's lives-jobs, housing, health, education and wellbeing there is another serious repercussion, as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned, the danger of the fight against the climate change – which he characterized as the “defining challenge of our era” – getting bogged down by shorter-term problems, such as the current global financial turmoil. (7/10/08)

Global warming “remains the defining challenge of our era,” Mr. Ban told reporters at his monthly press conference at UN Headquarters. “The danger is that, as with the [Millennium Development Goals], the magnitude of the threat will be obscured by shorter-term problems, and in particular the deepening financial crisis.”

The other danger is of course the threat of war as we enter uncharted waters of the economic collapse! Indications of an Israeli plan to attack Iran's nuclear facilities continue...creating uncertainty around the world.

Just last week ex PM John Howard was calling for defence spending to be maintained in the face of the economic downturn. The US military budget of \$70 Billion equals the 'bail out' in America, and Australia's defence budget is in excess of our education spending.

We in Just Peace consider there is a need to change course on this- it is patently clear that major financial cut backs **should** be made to military expenditure, with a shift in defence planning to Defence versus Offence.

As with all other funding decreases in this crisis it is timely to ask what will be done to fund and strengthen the only International body capable of dealing with Global crises- the United Nations.

In the last hours of 2007's International Day of Peace Youth Peace Parliament a young man addressed the group with “What do we want?” to which everyone replied “Peace!” “When do we want it?” NOW! “How do we get there?” all quiet..... he went on to provide his ideas on just that.....

Just Peace has sought to raise those ideas through public awareness about alternatives to war and the necessity of justice in achieving lasting peace.

Just Peace stands as both a group of locally active individuals and as a proud member of the global peace movement. We come from all walks of life, all ages and all political persuasions. Our one commonality is our commitment to a safe, just and peaceful world.

To that end over the past year our activities are as followed:

- Australia at the Crossroads- A New direction. This campaign resulted in a very successful public meeting in the Main Auditorium of Brisbane City Hall with 1300 people in attendance to hear Julian Burnside, Sharan Burrow, Dr Helen Caldicott, Jaqui Katona and Prof. Ian Lowe speak on why Australia so desperately needed a New Direction. Follow on activities included community engagements in 4 electorates. Banners were also displayed at Kangaroo Cliffs and at St Mary's corner.

- End of year party shared with the Brisbane Labor History Association marked the 100 anniversary of Australian referendum on conscription with a resounding NO vote.
- Participation in the Global Action to Prevent War conference at UQ.
- An alternative ANZAC day focused on the futility of war with music, poetry and art
- Screening of the film Liyan Ngarn as a shared event with WILPF
- Preparation and participation in International Day of Peace 2008 programme- including the 3rd Youth Peace Parliament.
- Preparation for visiting Israeli activist Prof Jeff Halper who leads the Israeli Campaign to end Housing Demolitions. His tour unfortunately postponed until early next year. He was delayed with the Free Gaza boat campaign.
- Participation in the UNAA national conference in August.
- Hosting of a meeting in September, with the Director of Peace Research Centre in Madrid Spain.
- Member of the QLD Nuclear Free Alliance, attending meetings and organising upcoming Strategy 2009 weekend on November 1-2.
- Member of the International Day of Peace Alliance, attending meetings and taking committee positions i.e. Co Convenor and Treasurer.
- Networking with WILPF, MAPW, RPND, FOE and other Peace and Justice organisations.
- Detailed communication with the Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs Minister, Attorney General and Defence Minister outlining our concerns and vision for Peace and Justice.
- Establishment of new web site www.justpeace.org

ABC Radio National continues to provide to its listeners with valuable information and insight into the issues of our time. Listening to Ockham's razor last Sunday made me think about our role in improving life on Planet Earth. The programme focused on the year 1859, how the lead up to that year included Darwin's research, communication advances through telegraph and travel. It was a period of massive cross fertilisation in science and technology and the coalescing of disparate ideas and scientific discovery culminated in a new view of the world leading to huge changes in technology, the development of economic and social ideals with strategic planning towards a more sustainable and egalitarian society on the one hand and on the other hand a race amongst a few for massive profits with exploitation of peoples at home and abroad. This time led to the development of Trade unions continuing today to protect the rights of workers and the birth of political parties representing the interests of workers. It could be claimed to have led to awareness of the interconnectedness of life on the planet leading to the efforts of Environmentalists plugging away for the past 30 years to constrain the big corporation's abuse of the natural world now finally succeeding in the quest for public understanding of the crisis we face.

2008 is another time in history where the fruit of activism in many areas is coming together, presenting a new paradigm of thought about how we live together on earth.

There is much hope for us choosing a new direction.

Never before have there been so many educated people on the planet who have learnt from history. There is great mistrust of the powerbrokers of the world, about managing the economy, the environment and waging barbaric illegal wars.

Now it may be possible to convince our people that war is not the answer and that in fact it is a roadblock to dealing with the major issues of the day.

What is missing is leadership for genuine change. With a new government in Australia the pressure needs to be on from the citizenry and organisations representing them.

Just Peace speaks for some of that citizenry. The submission to the Prime Minister you all received is part of that effort and our responsibility to communicate both positive and negative feedback.

Outlined in the submission are our concerns on

- Aggressive Militarism
- "War on Terror"
- Human Rights
- Foreign Policy

As yet we have not received a reply or acknowledgement. The letter was sent to the

- Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd
- Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith
- Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon
- Attorney General Robert McClelland

We are proceeding to send a copy to all MP's and Senators of the Federal Government.

In 2009 we hope to

- Consolidate our efforts to work with young people through the Youth Peace Parliament and QLD schools.
- Build awareness of UN declared resolution 55/282 to be observed on 21 September each year
- Highlight the need for a more independent foreign policy
- Support the development of a Bill of Rights as an important step towards a culture of peace
- Continue to host forums on issues related to Peace and Justice.

Membership of Just Peace is vital to our ability to work on our aims and objectives.

Whilst we continue to maintain a reasonable membership, there is always need to bring new people into the organization. I urge you to consider how you can assist!

Financially also new members boost the organization- as you will have seen from the treasurer's report our financial status is also satisfactory. However if we are to continue in our efforts, further income is required. We are grateful to the members who have made

donations, and to the Union of Australian Women for their financial support over the years.

Just Peace can only operate due to the efforts of its members from which the management committee is drawn. I would like to thank Beth Gordon as treasurer, Margaret Francis Cairns outgoing secretary, Norm Bullen for his tireless efforts in particular the letter to Kevin Rudd, and also Mike and Vicki Henry and Anthony Wheedon for their important contributions. I would also thank Adrian Pollock for the fantastic 'Peace Issue' newsletter mailed to our members, and Stephanie Campion for publishing the Just Peace E- Bulletin which now reaches well over a thousand people.

Can I also acknowledge and thank Senator Claire Moore and her staff in particular Meredith Newman for the printing of our newsletter and the friendly willing support in so many other ways provided. Past Senator Andrew Bartlett must also be acknowledged for his untiring efforts promoting peace and human rights and his support for Just Peace during his time in office.

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