



Together Online

In This Issue:

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- Like oil and water? - Religion and human rights in Australia?
- Think:Fast - Be hungry for change for the world's poorest people.
- Bishops Speak Up for Charities & NFPs
- Anti-Poverty Week Ecumenical Service
- Act for peace and the Millennium Development Goals
- Events for the Heart and Mind

Like oil and water? - Religion and human rights in Australia?

The Race Discrimination Commissioner, Tom Calma, called for as many Australians as possible to become involved in a discussion about the current state of freedom of religion and belief in Australia when he launched the Australian Human Rights Commission's Freedom of religion and belief in the 21st century Discussion Paper in Canberra today.

"The fundamental human right of freedom of religion and belief is protected by a number of international treaties and declarations," said Commissioner Calma. "It encompasses freedom of thought on all matters and the freedom to demonstrate and express our religion and belief individually, with others, in private or in public."

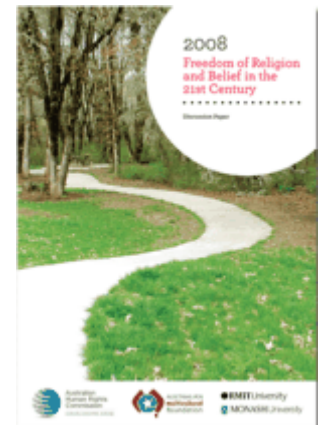
"The intent of this discussion paper is to examine and report upon the extent to which this right can be enjoyed in Australia today by drawing from practical everyday experiences and observations," said Mr Calma. "This is easy for some, while others feel religion and human rights don't mix, like oil and water."

In calling for submissions from the public, the Commissioner pointed out that the intersection of religion and belief with human rights is illustrated daily in our news headlines.

"The involvement of religious institutions in school curriculums and practices, religious and ethical concerns about scientific research, the status of Muslim communities in society since the events of September 11 2001, the involvement of religion in debates about homosexuality or abortion, and our politicians declaring their faith on the campaign trail – these are just some of the stories that involve us every day at the intersection of religion and belief with human rights," said Commissioner Calma.

"Given that these issues are continually in the headlines, it is timely that they be comprehensively evaluated in terms of their impacts on the practice, expression and perception of religion and spirituality in Australia," said Mr Calma. "A better understanding of these issues and the way they influence, and are influenced by, our attitudes and laws will assist us as to advance our nation's social and cultural prosperity."

Commissioner Calma emphasised that gaining a comprehensive understanding of these issues could not be achieved merely by consultation with academics, religious institutions and government.



“To achieve the intention of our discussion paper, we need to hear from as many people as possible, from as many walks of life, with as many different experiences to share as we can.”

Submissions opened on the 17th of September and close on 31 January 2009.
To read the discussion paper and make submissions:
Electronic submissions are encouraged by visiting www.humanrights.gov.au/frb
or emailing frb@humanrights.gov.au
Submissions can also be made by post to Race Discrimination Unit:
Education and Partnerships Section,
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission,
GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001.
For enquiries, call (02) 9284 9600 or 1800 620 241.

The Freedom of religion and belief in the 21st century project is being run in partnership with the Australian Multicultural Foundation, RMIT University and Monash University.
Media contact: Brinsley Marlay 02 9284 9656 or 0430 366 529

Bishops Speak Up for Charities & NFPs

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has made a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Economics' Inquiry into the Disclosure Regimes for Charities and Not-for-Profit Organizations. They stress the complexity and diversity of the sector.

The submission makes the point that Catholic Church agencies are major providers of services, especially in the areas of Education, Health and Community Services. The issues and needs in these different areas differ greatly from one another and, accordingly, the issues and needs of Catholic Church agencies providing services in these diverse areas differ greatly. This submission on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) seeks to address a number of general issues of relevance to the Committee's Inquiry.

[Read More...](#)

<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bishops/confpres/2008090364.htm>



Act for peace and the Millennium Development Goals

“I didn't know it was so good to be able to read and write. Now I am learning. My teacher says I am a good writer, but sometimes is hard! Someday I will write my story and maybe more people would help us.” Amina Ishaq is a teenager leaving in an Internally Displaced People camp in Sudan; one of those camps supported by act for peace.

act for peace is the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. Therefore, act for peace bases its activities around four fundamental principles: reduce extreme poverty, protect refugees and people at risk, prevent and resolve conflicts and empower communities. Working in this way act for peace is in total agreement with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At the turn of the 21st century and with the beginning of a New Millennium, the United Nations and the world leaders met to discuss the future of the world. In



this meeting, they agreed on a number of global goals that should be achieved in the New Millennium. These eight goals are known as The MDGs, which deal with poverty and hunger, universal primary education, gender equality and empower women, child mortality and maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability and a global partnership for development.

Nevertheless, in according to the last United Nation Report, these tasks have become now more challenging because we are in the middle of a global economic slowdown and a food security crises both of uncertain magnitude and of duration. In July this year, Anglican bishops and their spouses in London for the Lambeth Conference, demonstrated their support of poverty reduction worldwide, walking in purple cassocks and native dress. The one-hour march, which created a river of violet down some London streets came behind a banner reading "Keep the Promise/ Halve Poverty by 2015," references to one of the eight MDGs.

In this important moment in world history, act for peace is able to help the achievement of the MDGs and able to help people like Amina Ishaq. As a result, we have decided to invite our readers of Together Online discuss those MDGs and how the act for peace activities came in agreement with these International Goals. If you have an opinion you would like to share with us about the MDGs, please send us your comments and they can be part of our next issue.

Think:Fast - Be hungry for change for the world's poorest people.

Be hungry for change for the world's poorest people.



Anglicans around the world are called to mark the days between 20th and 27th September 2008 as days of prayer and fasting, around the meeting of leaders of the world at the UN 25 September in at the UN Special Assembly to consider the Millennium Development Goals.

2008 marks the halfway point towards the target date of the UN Millennium Development Goals. General Ban Ki-moon, the UN General Secretary, is convening a high-level event on 25 September which will bring together world-leaders, representatives of the private sector and civil society partners to discuss specific ways to energise efforts by the world community for the eradication of poverty.

The forum will review progress, identify gaps and commit to concrete efforts, resources and mechanisms to further the work of the Millennium Development Goals.

World leaders will be asked to announce specific plans and proposals.

On the 14th of September, the Bishop of London, Dr Richard Chartres, used a service in St. Paul's Cathedral to launch Think:Fast - a ten day period of prayer and fasting aimed at raising awareness around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the fight against global poverty.

Think : Fast is an initiative proposed by the Bishop of London, in partnership with Micah Challenge, to urge Christians – in London and beyond - to take action by

praying and fasting in the ten days leading up to the UN meeting.

The Bishop of London said:

"In today's interconnected world loving your neighbour starts at home but extends throughout the world. It is idle to talk of loving our neighbours while neglecting the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. "Supporting the Millennium Development Goals is a 21st century way of loving our neighbour. Promises have been made and world leaders have to be held to account for those promises even at a time of economic difficulty. I hope and pray that the Think:Fast initiative goes some way to heightening our awareness that we should not rest easy while others face extreme poverty and have so little share in our rich and fruitful earth."

Anti-Poverty Week Ecumenical Service

To highlight our uniting call of solidarity against poverty.

"Australia: Rich Young Nation"

Keynote address: Bishop Donald Sproxton, Catholic Auxilliary Bishop of Perth. Please join us at St Brigid's Catholic Church, cnr Fitzgerald and Aberdeen Sts Northbridge.

Tuesday 14th October at 12.15pm followed by refreshments in the church hall.

The service is a joint venture with:

- The Catholic Social Justice Council, Archdiocese of Perth
- Social Responsibilities Commission, Anglican Province of WA
- Uniting Church in WA, Social Justice Board
- St George's Cathedral Perth
- Council of Churches of WA
- Anglicare WA

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Events for the Heart and Mind

In this edition:

Discovering Balance - An international conference on prison reform, restorative justice, and human rights; Beyond Occupation? Examining the New Reality in Israel and Palestine; Anti Poverty Week; Christ & Culture; The Law of the Land.

October 2-4 Discovering Balance – October 2nd – 4th

An international conference on prison reform, restorative justice, and human rights.

The 2nd – 4th October 2008, Murdoch University, Western Australia.

Discovering Balance will include presentations and workshops from activists, researchers, academics, and community and government representatives exploring a wide range of issues including penal reform, victims' rights, restorative processes, Indigenous justice, and rehabilitation.

Conference Themes and Plenary Sessions - Prisoner rehabilitation; Victims' rights and



restorative processes; Human rights in custodial settings; Indigenous Australians and the criminal justice system; Restorative prisons; Restorative justice processes and juveniles; Restorative processes and human rights in a punitive society; Prison reform, the media and the public.

More information and registration forms can be found at <http://irjpr.net.au/conference/>

Beyond Occupation? Examining the New Reality in Israel and Palestine

A talk by Dr Sara Roy, senior research scholar at Harvard University's Centre for Middle Eastern Studies

Social Sciences Lecture Theatre

University of Western Australia

6.30pm Thursday October 9th

Entry by donation

Drinks and nibbles will be provided

co-hosted by Friends of Palestine WA and the Centre for Muslim States and Societies

Anti Poverty Week

Find out about activities near you, access resources, get useful contacts, and see how you can join in

Anti Poverty Week 12- 18 October by visiting

<http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au/index.html>

Christ & Culture

Book now for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission's conference on Indigenous theology and spirituality. The theme is Christ and Culture and it will be held 16 – 20 February 2009 in Ballina, NSW.

More...

The Law of the Land

ECCWA has produced a DVD to introduce to all newcomers to this country, details of the legal and justice system in Australia. This DVD has been produced in 13 languages, including English. The non English languages are Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, Cantonese, Dari, Dinka, French, Kirundi, Mandarin, Somali and Swahili. The DVD is a very good production and covers the essential areas of law that people would be exposed to whilst living in this country.

We have a substantial number of copies of the DVD and would like to see them distributed as widely as possible. Obviously there are mailing costs involved and we would prefer it if you are able to call by to pick them up. Please let us know how many copies you would like to get and we can set them aside for you. There is no cost for the DVD. Contact ECCWA on 92275322.

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