

### From the National Director

I would like to inform you that, in the spirit of Churches Working Together, CWS recently convened a meeting of Church aid agencies (eg. Caritas Australia, Anglicord, UCOA, etc). We agreed to look at:

- The role of faith based agencies in authentic human development;
- The feasibility of an Australian Action by Churches Together (ACT) programme;
- A common Millennium Development Goals (MDG) focus.

### Refugee Sunday

Please see the contact points, listed in this issue of In Focus, for material, resources and ideas to mark Refugee Sunday (31 August). As the community continues to grapple with political and other implications of refugee and asylum seeker issues, Refugee Sunday gives us an opportunity to consider our response informed by the Gospel.

### Thank you

By June, Christmas Bowl income was \$2,342,189, a 3.08 % increase over the same period last year. Our deep appreciation goes to all the donors, and churches, ecumenical and other groups, and individual promoters. Whenever a community is enabled to feel or glimpse life or hope anew, it is their Christmas!

Thank you.

*Caesar D'Mello*

### Iraq Update

Visiting pediatric and maternity hospitals in Baghdad was a recent gruesome experience for Leila Dzaferovic, Appeals Officer for Action by Churches Together International (ACT). ACT is coordinating emergency relief work in Iraq on behalf of worldwide partners, including CWS Australia.

"Arriving at Baghdad airport it looked like a military base - Baghdad itself is very run-down and an extremely sad place, it is all very depressing following the years of sanctions. There were many visible results of the recent military action as well. Unemployment, severe poverty and inadequate hospital and medical facilities are the major problems", she said in a briefing in late June.

Australian people have responded quickly and generously to the Joint Emergency Appeal for Iraq initiated by Muslim Aid Australia and CWS, raising A\$86,753 by the end of June.

The hospitals were extremely overcrowded and there was a desperate lack of staff and equipment. Malnutrition, respiratory diseases and diarrhoea continue to increase and the whole health sector needs urgent emergency relief.

The level of radioactivity is over one thousand times higher than previously and the first cases of radiation sickness have been identified.

ACT is responding to these needs with immediate relief and with longer term plans for ongoing support.

The World Food Program is again operating in most of the areas and ACT's partner, the Middle East Council of Churches, was preparing a proposal for supplementary food aid - strong staff in Baghdad have a good geographical coverage in the country.

Security remained a problem - as long as people were hungry and unemployed and not receiving medical help security would continue to be a problem.

Leila's hope for Iraq was that "soon it won't need us - the international community should exit as soon as possible and allow the Iraqi people to establish a stable self-sufficient state - the Iraqi agenda must come first - the people there know what they need".



CWS will continue to forward funds for emergency relief work in Iraq - please send your gifts to CWS or to telephone 1800 025 101 or to our secure site [www.nccca.org.au](http://www.nccca.org.au)

*Colleen Hodge*

This kindergarten has been looted since the overthrow of the Saddam regime. Homeless people have taken up residence in the building and children play amongst the abandoned ammunition. The door cannot be locked. Photo: Peter Høvring (DCA/ACT International)



Credit Teniele Wilmot

### What is Refugee Sunday?

Refugee Sunday (31 August, 2003) is a celebration of the contribution refugees have made to Australia that is held every year in thousands of churches around Australia. Each year, the National Council of Churches in Australia produces an Education Kit that contains educational reports, as well as Liturgy and parishes resources for helping celebrate the day and take further action. For copies of the Refugee Sunday Education Kit, please contact James Thomson on (02) 9299 2215 or [jthomson@ncca.org.au](mailto:jthomson@ncca.org.au)

The Education Kit and much more will be available on our website at [www.ncca.org.au](http://www.ncca.org.au) on 2nd August 2003

How can you help protect refugees on Refugee Sunday?

- Celebrate Refugee Sunday in your local church on 31 August 2003 with a special ecumenical liturgy highlighting the plight of refugees and displaced people (see above to order a free Education Kit, which contains a special Liturgy and parish resources).

- 'Welcome the stranger' in your community by organising an event with friends, family and refugees and asylum seekers from your area.
- Reflect on the ecumenical liturgy and information sheets provided in the education kit and pray for the plight of uprooted people.

Or, put your faith into action by:

- Sending us a phone card to help an asylum seeker in detention call home or call a lawyer - its only \$5 or \$10, but it makes a huge difference to someone isolated in a detention centre.
- Volunteering at the House of Welcome to assist refugees released from detention on Temporary Protection Visas (contact Patricia on (02) 9299 2215).

**Australians have always welcomed the stranger. Refugee Sunday aims to make that welcome official.**

### Refugees and church groups go bush

A group of Sudanese, Ethiopian, Iraqi and Afghanistan refugees, and people from Melbourne church organisations, social justice groups and community support agencies recently went bush to talk about the plight of people seeking asylum in Australia and the struggle for many when they arrive here.

Called Journey on the Wind it was organised by the NCCA and a number of agencies from Victorian churches.

Thousands of people in northwest Victoria participated in the Journey, which involved visits in schools, dinners and story-telling evenings, shopping centre information displays, advocacy workshops and participation in church services.



Coordinator, Caz Coleman, said the Journey brought to life the experiences of people arriving in Australia and the reality of their lives in a new country. It was also a way of advocating for a more just and compassionate reception for asylum seekers who come to Australia.

Sister Stancea Vichie, project worker with the Asylum Seeker Project of the Uniting Church's Hotham Mission, said "Australians from rural areas, along with people from urban areas, often join together in different initiatives to support those who come to Australia seeking protection. Journey on the Wind was an opportunity for all - refugees, asylum seekers, and people from rural and urban areas - to learn from one another and to discover more deeply, our common humanity."

Journey on the Wind offered participants opportunity for wide-ranging reflection in preparation for Refugee Sunday on 31 August.

### Heads of Churches Refugee Sunday Statement

For 50 years, Australian churches have helped refugees. Since 1997, Australian churches have marked Refugee Sunday. This year, Australia needs a gospel response.

We stand at the crossroads. Confronted by the horrors of war, persecution and displacement. Forced to deal with the victims of atrocities and persecution. Challenged by the need to rid humanity of the poverty, injustice and persecution that breeds discrimination and violence.

Will we fear the stranger and close our doors, or open our minds and work to bridge the ethnic, religious and political divides by welcoming and protecting refugees?"

#### Australia's Challenge: to Protect or Reject Refugees?

In October 2002, Australia and 61 other member states of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Executive Committee made an undertaking to protect, rather than reject, refugees when endorsing the Agenda for Protection\* (see: [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)).

Having made the commitment, nations like Australia must now live up to their promises to protect and not reject refugees, and share instead of shift their responsibilities. Australia has a strong track record in voluntarily resettling offshore refugees. The Gospel now calls upon us to challenge Australia's treatment of onshore refugees and asylum seekers:

- Our system of mandatory, indefinite and non-reviewable detention should be replaced by community-release models for children and their families.
- Struggling on-shore refugees granted Temporary Protection Visas and asylum seekers in the community on bridging visas need much improved income and services support.
- Massive over-spending on border control should be reduced and funds diverted to the UNHCR to assist displaced people in refugee camps and help neighbouring states provide effective protection.
- Australia's so-called 'Pacific Solution' should be abandoned.

While some governments weaken refugee protections, the Agenda stands as a beacon of hope. UNHCR's "Convention Plus" initiative stands as another beacon of hope, aiming to complement the Refugee Convention with agreements on secondary movement, mass influxes, resettlement, conflict prevention and development assistance. Implementing these initiatives, however, requires international co-operation and the support of UN member states.

Signed by Heads of NCCA Member Churches  
Archbishop Peter Carnley, Anglican Church Of Australia;  
Archbishop Baliozian, Armenian Apostolic Church  
Bishop Mar Meelis Zaia, Assyrian Church Of The East;  
Revd Peter Overton, Churches Of Christ In Australia;  
Archbishop Stylianos, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia;  
Revd Mike Semmler, Lutheran Church Of Australia;  
Ruth Watson, Religious Society Of Friends;  
Revd Dr Gabriel Popescu, Romanian Orthodox Church;  
Commissioners Les Strong & Ross Kendrew, Salvation Army;  
Most Revd Francis Carroll, Roman Catholic Church;  
Revd Professor James Haire, Uniting Church In Australia

\* The Agenda for Protection is a 27-page document that represents an international consensus on policy and a blueprint for concerted international action. It is the product of a two-year series of Global Consultations and is one of the most important documents since the 1951 Refugee Convention.

## Zikomo Felix and Martha!



"Bwanji."

Thousands of Australians now know how to say, "Hello and welcome" in Nyanja, a Zambian language. They also know a lot more about the issues and challenges facing Zambia, a small very poor nation in southern Africa.

Martha Siame and Felix Banda, two young people from Zambia, came to Australia for sixteen hectic days around Simply Sharing Week. They came to share stories about water projects, debt and HIV/AIDS.

Only 28% of rural Zambians have access to clean, safe drinking water. Martha and Felix talked about this issue in lively interesting ways. Kids carried water cans on their heads (or tried to!) and they learnt how life can change if there is a water pump in the village.

Adults learnt about the ravages caused by AIDS - 20% of Zambian adults have HIV/AIDS and there are one million orphans. How can a poor country of 10 million cope with such a tragic burden?

It was encouraging to hear from Martha, whose work includes AIDS education, that churches are active in helping communities to look after victims' families and educating young people.

People responded enthusiastically to Martha and Felix's message, their smiles and their music. Forceten sold lots of water bottles and gift cards and raised thousands of dollars for projects in Zambia.

What did Felix and Martha notice about Australia?

- there are lots of old people here (life expectancy in Zambia is only 37 years)
- people on trains and buses seem so glum - nobody smiles
- Australia is a very rich country
- It is great that Australians care about Zambia

"Zikomo" - thank you Felix and Martha for coming to Australia

## Accountability of Overseas Aid

In recent weeks, there has been some media focus on the use of funds raised by aid agencies.

It is right and proper that explanations be provided on how aid funds are disbursed overseas. It is indefensible, however, if generalised and unsubstantiated claims damaged the reputation of the entire aid sector.

Christian World Service monitoring mechanisms include

- The work undertaken by staff, and other designated individuals, through visits and other ways, within the framework of a rigorous manual of procedures;
- The oversight of the International Programs Committee, the Finance Committee, the Commission for Christian World Service, and the Executive of the National Council of Churches in Australia;
- An external audit;

- Reports by church agencies such as Christian Aid (UK), Church World Service (USA), CWS (New Zealand), Bread for the World (Germany) and others, as well as Australian church agencies;
- Reporting by relevant Councils of Churches directly to CWS, and through external audits and evaluation;
- The ACFOA Code of Conduct, and AusAid accreditation requirements.

We welcome your ideas and queries.  
Caesar D'Mello.

Christmas is coming...and so is the Christmas Bowl.  
To order kits, resources and to find out about our Christmas Bowl visitors, visit our section of the site - [Christian World Service, Christmas Bowl](#)  
or call (02) 9299 2215