

Contributing to a Just and Peaceful World

““ Our Vision:

Australia acts with courage and conviction to build a just and peaceful world. We are a nation that works in partnership with other nations to dismantle the structural and historical causes of violence, injustice and inequality. Our government upholds human rights everywhere, acting in the best interests of all people and the planet.

Our Hopes:

- Australia is a good neighbour in our region and beyond, seeking the common good of people and planet alongside national interests.
- Australia upholds its international human rights obligations and uses United Nations mechanisms to strengthen human rights at home and abroad.
- Australia is a generous contributor to ending global poverty and inequality, with a timeline for increasing our international aid contribution to 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) in line with international commitments.⁵²
- Vulnerable people at risk of human trafficking are educated about their rights, have access to better opportunities and are protected and enforced by anti-trafficking laws.
- The rights of seasonal workers in Australia are protected and local communities assist in providing pastoral care.
- Nations armed with nuclear weapons agree to destroy their stockpiles in accordance with a legally-binding, time-bound plan.
- A peacefully negotiated resolution for Israel and Palestine affirming the right for both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine to live side by side in peace and security.

Witness from the Bible

- God's call and God's blessing is focused toward the sharing of blessing with others (**Genesis 12: 1 – 3**).
- The prophet Isaiah's vision of a servant of God, which Jesus later claimed for himself, was of someone who lightens the burden of workers, breaks chains and brings freedom to the oppressed, brings good news to the poor and comforts the broken hearted (**Isaiah 58: 6, 61: 1 cf. Luke 4: 18**).
- Jesus teaching consistently calls for a love of all people, even enemies (**Matthew 5: 43 – 44**), and his disciples are called to be "peacemakers" (**Matthew 5: 9**), to the "ministry of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5: 18**) and to pursuing peace with everyone (**Hebrews 12: 14**).

- The New Testament teaches that when one suffers, all suffer together (**1 Corinthians 12:26**), and calls us to care for others not just ourselves (**Romans 12: 9 – 13; Philippians 2: 1 – 4; Galatians 6: 3**).

What the UCA has said

The Statement to the Nation (1977)

"We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond. We affirm the rights of all people to equal opportunities. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms."

Overseas Aid (2015)

The Assembly resolved to:

- a) Affirm that Australian development aid, funded by the government, church and individuals, is an effective and powerful way of combating poverty and injustice throughout the world, thereby addressing the root causes of conflict, instability, people displacement and disease.
- b) Express profound concern regarding the recent cuts that will reduce Australian government aid to the lowest levels in our history.
- c) Call on the Federal Government to:
 - i. Restore overseas aid funding cut from the 2015-16 budget; and
 - ii. Announce a credible timetable to allocate 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income to Australia's overseas aid program, commensurate with Australian's international obligations.

Palestine (2015)

The Assembly resolved to:

- a) Receive the requests from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, the Kairos Palestine movement and the World Council of Churches to act in response to the plight of people of Palestine.

The UCA has issued a number of statements in solidarity with our partner churches in response to communal and religious conflict, and political tension in the life of their societies.

The State of the Nation

Australia has stepped back its contributions to foreign aid

- Despite the proportion of undernourished people being almost halved since 1990 (now under 11%) there are still 821 million people—one in nine worldwide—going hungry each year.⁵³ Due to protracted conflicts and rising populations, undernourishment and severe food insecurity have been increasing.⁵⁴
- Australians are the wealthiest people on the planet, when measured by median wealth, but Australia now ranks 19th among rich country aid donors.
- Australia spends \$4.0 billion dollars on overseas aid – 0.22% of our gross national income, or 22 cents in every \$100. This is set to drop even further to just 19c in every \$100 of GNI by 2021.
- Since 2013, in cumulative terms, the Australian aid budget has been cut by over 30 per cent.⁵⁵

Key Actions:

1. Scale up Australia's aid program to approximately 0.3% GNI by 2021-22.
2. Recommit Australia to the internationally-agreed target of contributing 0.7 per cent of GNI to overseas aid by 2030.

People across our region are trapped in modern slavery and vulnerable to human trafficking

- An estimated 40.3 million men, women, and children were victims of modern slavery on any given day in 2016. Of these, 25 million people were in forced labour and 15.4 million people were living in a forced marriage.⁵⁶
- 62% of the 25 million people trapped in forced labour are in the Asia-Pacific region⁵⁷ and far too many are being exploited to produce goods and services that Australians enjoy.
- People are vulnerable to trafficking and modern slavery for a number of reasons, including lack of education and employment opportunities, discrimination and social isolation, and lack of protection by adults or social systems.

- Australia has introduced a Modern Slavery Act, which can be a powerful tool in the fight against modern day slavery and human trafficking in the supply chains of businesses, however the Act lacks penalties for non-compliance as well as independent oversight.

Key Actions:

1. Greater awareness of modern slavery and human trafficking, support for people who have been trafficked in Australia and international collaboration to enforce laws against trafficking.
2. Commit to strengthening compliance with Australia's Modern Slavery Act through penalties for non-compliant businesses and the appointment of an independent anti-slavery commissioner.

Go deeper

You may like to follow up other issues that the UCA has previously spoken about:

We are yet to achieve just peace in Palestine and Israel

- Palestine has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. The prospects for a negotiated peace and a "two-state solution" are bleak.
- Israeli settlements and other Israeli land confiscations have taken over nearly half of the West Bank.

Key Action

Support international efforts towards a just peace in Palestine and Israel.

Australia has not signed on to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

- Nuclear weapons threaten the survival of humanity and our living planet. The effects transcend national boundaries and span generations.⁵⁸
- Australia has long claimed to be a proud supporter of nuclear disarmament.
- A global majority of nations negotiated the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017. It is the first treaty to comprehensively outlaw nuclear weapons, setting out a pathway for their total elimination.
- Australia has not signed on to the treaty.

Key Action:

Sign on and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Conflict in West Papua and Papua (Indonesia) has not been resolved

- The Papuan Provinces of Indonesia (Papua and West Papua) continue to be marked by violence, political repression and persecution of indigenous peoples by Indonesian police and military.⁵⁹
- In 2014, the government resolved to address past human rights injustices, but none have been followed through and perpetrators continue to operate with impunity.
- Christian churches in the Papuan provinces have regularly called for peace dialogues that address the political causes of the ongoing conflict.⁶⁰
- Due to Australia's proximity and trade ties with Indonesia, we have a responsibility to promote justice, dialogue and stronger human rights protections in our region.

Key Actions:

1. Support local and international efforts for peace and justice in the Papuan Provinces
2. Urge the Australian government to prioritise human rights in the Papuan Provinces in diplomatic relations with Indonesia
3. Continue to express to the Australian government our concerns for Papua, and call on them to support initiatives that involve peace, reconciliation and the development of an effective voice for all Papuans regarding their future.⁶¹

Discussion Starters or Questions for Candidates

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to a candidate before the election.

1. What is your party's commitment to Australia's aid program?
2. What policies do you have to prevent human trafficking?
3. What can you do to support a just and peaceful resolution in Palestine and Israel?
4. Will you support Australia signing the UN Treaty in the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons?
5. How does or how can you local community contribute to the world beyond Australia in ways that lead to a more just, safe and peaceful world for all?

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Thanks go to...

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See also

<https://nswact.uca.org.au/social-justice/the-social-justice-forum/>

<http://unitingearthweb.org.au/>

In developing this document, we drew on the excellent work already done in **Australia Remade** by the A24 Alliance, a collection of individuals and diverse organisation with a shared commitment to put people and planet first. We also considered some of the excellent work being done in the **Australian National Development Index (ANDI) Project**.

Uniting Church members are encouraged to visit the websites of all the above groups to further explore the issues and questions that arise as we consider what it means to live and act justly.