

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.
- Vulnerable people at risk of human trafficking are educated about their rights, have access to better opportunities and are protected by enforced 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; Philipians 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 the 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

- Australia's public spending on Official Development Assistance (ODA) as a proportion of our Gross National Income in 2021-22 is expected to fall to 0.21%, down from an estimated 0.22% in 2020-21⁸¹.
- The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average for ODA/GNI in 2020 was 0.32%⁸².
- According to the Development Policy Centre, Australia was the 14th most generous DAC member in 2015. In 2020, its ranking has dropped to 21st⁸³.
- This is in the face of the first increase in extreme poverty in over 20 years across the globe, with the multiple impacts of COVID-19. Furthermore, our immediate region is poorer and more unstable, and the global vaccine roll-out is highly inequitable.
- People in Australia are among the wealthiest people on the planet, when measured by median wealth, but Australia now ranks 19th among rich country aid donors⁸⁴.

Key actions:

1. Scale up Australia's aid program to approximately 0.3% GNI by 2022–23.
2. Recommit Australia to the internationally agreed target of contributing 0.7 per cent of GNI to overseas aid by 2030.
3. Australian Government partner with global institutions, Australian NGOs and our regional neighbours, to address the worst impacts of COVID-19 on the world's most vulnerable nations and communities.
4. Support developing nations to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

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 marriage⁸⁵.

- 62% of the 25 million people trapped in forced labour are in the Asia-Pacific region⁸⁶ and far too many are being exploited to produce goods and services that people in Australia 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 systems⁸⁷.
- 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.

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 requiring businesses importing goods with high risk of modern slavery in their production to thoroughly investigate their suppliers to adequately address the risk.
3. Appointment of a national 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 1967⁸⁸. The prospects for a negotiated peace and a "two-state solution" are bleak.

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 are unique in their destructive power and the threat they pose to the environment and human survival⁸⁹.
- The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has been signed by 86 nations and ratified by 54. It entered into force in January 2021⁹⁰. 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

- Indigenous Papuans (from the Indonesian Provinces of Papua and West Papua) are facing violence from Indonesian security forces, racial discrimination, exploitation of natural resources and environment by national and multi-national companies as well as the military⁹¹.
- Christian churches in the Papuan provinces have regularly called for peace dialogues that address the political causes of the ongoing conflict⁹².
- 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 Indonesian 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.

Stop the killings and promote human rights in the Philippines

- Extrajudicial killings, including the killing of thousands of people under a so-called 'war on drugs', is reprehensible⁹³.
- Church people in the Philippines involved in supporting those in poverty, defending human rights, and supporting Indigenous people are often targeted with false charges by police. They are also subjected to death threats and other serious intimidation and harassment⁹⁴.
- A climate of impunity has been normalised by the Philippine president's regular incitements to violence to punish legitimate dissent⁹⁵.

Key action:

Urge the Australian government to use its ties with the Philippines to promote and prioritise human rights there.

Restore democracy and justice in Myanmar

- In February 2021, Myanmar's military launched a coup to remove the National League for Democracy party that was elected by popular vote⁹⁶.
- The military has since killed more than 700 people⁹⁷ and forcibly disappeared hundreds more during widespread protests⁹⁸.
- There are now fears that a civil war and widespread humanitarian crisis will engulf the country.

Key action:

Call on Australia to use all diplomatic and multilateral means available to end the trade of arms to Myanmar and pressure the military to restore democracy.

Discussion starters

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 MPs or community leaders.

1. What is your party's or organisation'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 on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons?
5. How can we work together to promote democracy and support local civil society groups, including churches, who are resisting authoritarian governments around the world?
6. How does or how can your 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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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.