

# Eaglehawk Uniting Church

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2013

Merrill Cole

## International Day of Peace

The International Day of Peace was established by the United Nations in 1981. Each year it is observed by churches and other faith communities, individuals, schools and governments around the world as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and people, and as an annual day of non-violence and cease-fire. On the day, the United Nations invites all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities, and to commemorate the moment through education and public awareness on issues related to peace. In 2004, the then World Council of Churches General Secretary, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, proposed 21 September as the International Day of Prayer for Peace, and invited member churches to mark that day with a special service. Churches across Australia mark the day each year. The International Day of Peace is an opportunity for us to get the issue of aid and peace on the Australian national agenda. By taking action on this day, our voices will join with millions of others in Australia and across the world. Together we can break the cycle of conflict and poverty – for good.

## **Prayer for Peace**

(WCC Ecumenical Prayer cycle)

To be more patient - **GIVE US STRENGTH, LORD.**

To become peacemakers - **EQUIP US LORD.**

To be right - **GIVE US YOUR LIGHT, LORD.**

To accept our faults - **GIVE US HUMILITY, LORD.**

To be in solidarity with those who suffer - **MAKE US SYMPATHETIC, LORD.**

That our actions will be guided by love - **GIVE US YOUR SPIRIT, LORD.**

**AMEN.**

## PEACE TODAY - FACT OR FICTION ??

Matthew 5: 1-9, 42-48 and Luke 1: 72-79

Information taken from the 'Act for Peace' [www.actforpeace.org.au/peaceday](http://www.actforpeace.org.au/peaceday) and 'Vision of Humanity' for global peace index ratings [www.visionofhumanity.org](http://www.visionofhumanity.org)

### Injustice & Violence

As we mark the International Day of Peace on 21 September, we are reminded that one in four around the world live in conflict-affected countries. These countries account for almost half of all child deaths, and a third of all children who do not complete primary school. These are lives stolen by conflict.

There are many stories to tell – stories soaked with violence, the violation of human dignity and the destruction of creation.

Today we come together in ecumenical action to build a better world. There is hope. Churches across Australia and their congregations are an influential voice in Australian public life.

Message from Rev Elenie Poulos,  
Act for Peace Chairperson

*International Day of Peace is an opportunity to reflect on the injustice of violence and take some simple actions. Australia's churches already contribute much towards building peace where it is needed most, such as through their support of the Christmas Bowl. If we all come together for International Day of Peace and speak up we can take the next step towards responding to God's call to be peacemakers and for the churches to be central in this.*



2

Act for Peace is an active member of the global ACT Alliance which is at work in over 150 countries. Because of this unique alliance, they are able to respond to the most critical humanitarian emergencies almost immediately in a concerted effort with their partners.

Once they have helped provide immediate assistance their work continues with communities to rebuild lives and help them better prepare for disasters in the future.

“There was a huge explosion. When I woke up I saw that both my legs were gone. I thought my life was over.” Ismail Mustafa didn’t see the mine. He was collecting mushrooms on a hill near his home when life as he had known it changed forever.

“My daughter has also been injured,” adds Ismail. “She found a shell and brought it into the house and put it on the fire. She didn’t know what she was doing at the time – she was only three. She is now blind and has lost an arm. I have taken her to hospital in Iran twice and they should be able to save one of her eyes because she can see a little, but at the moment I have no money for treatment.

It is hard but it could be worse.”

Decades of conflict have left Iraq littered with landmines and other explosive remnants of war. As well as threatening lives and limbs, mines limit access to land and resources, and prevent the delivery of basic services such as health and education. Tragically, nearly half the deaths from landmines and explosive weapons in Iraq are children.

But, with the help of Act for Peace and its local partner MAG, local communities are getting protection. “All this area around my house used to be a minefield but MAG has cleared it,” says Ismail. “As far as I’m concerned, the MAG guys don’t need to pray; they don’t need to go to the mosque on Fridays. They have done enough for God and they get a million thanks from the people. Just look at what they have done!”

# Fact Sheet: Conflict

4

*We know that all creation groans to be set free, not least from the abusive actions of humans. (cf Romans 8:22).*

### **Right now, conflict is stealing lives around the world.**

**It kills. It maims. It destroys communities. And it robs children, women and men of the chance of a better future. Families are locked in a desperate cycle of conflict and poverty.**

Almost one in four people worldwide live in conflict-affected countries. Their lives are being decimated by war. By next year, just 30 conflict-affected countries will account for:

- † half of all child deaths across the world
- 📖 a third of children who do not complete primary school
- 🚫 a third of deaths from HIV/AIDS
- 💧 a third of people who lack access to clean water. <sup>1</sup>

It kills. It maims. It destroys communities. And it robs children, women and men of the chance of a better future. Families are locked in a desperate cycle of conflict and poverty

*People are being left behind, trapped in a cycle of conflict and poverty.*

By contrast, many other developing countries – free of the suffocating impact of violence – have started to overcome poverty. That’s why we must tackle the root causes of conflict if we are to significantly reduce global poverty.

Conflict-affected countries face serious and complex challenges. As well as the presence of day-to-day violence or the legacy of recent conflict, they often experience weak government, chronic political instability and widespread corruption. But with the right assistance, progress is possible.

### **The price to pay**

#### *Peace-building projects save lives*

Peace-building projects protect communities by removing landmines and restricting the sale of guns and weapons. They reduce suffering and rebuild lives, by preventing and rehabilitating child soldiers. And through reform of the police and security systems and support for civilian peace-building projects, help war-torn communities to build a more stable future, free from poverty.

Australia spends just 0.01% (1 cent in every \$100) of national income on direct 'conflict-reduction, peace and security' (peace-building) projects. We have an opportunity to continue our proud tradition of supporting peace.

<i>How we spend every \$100 of our national income</i>	
1 cent	Aid to peace-building projects
1 cent	Foreign Affairs budget to the UN peacekeeping and peace diplomacy
10 cents	Defence budget for peace and stabilisation operations
\$99.88	Other purposes

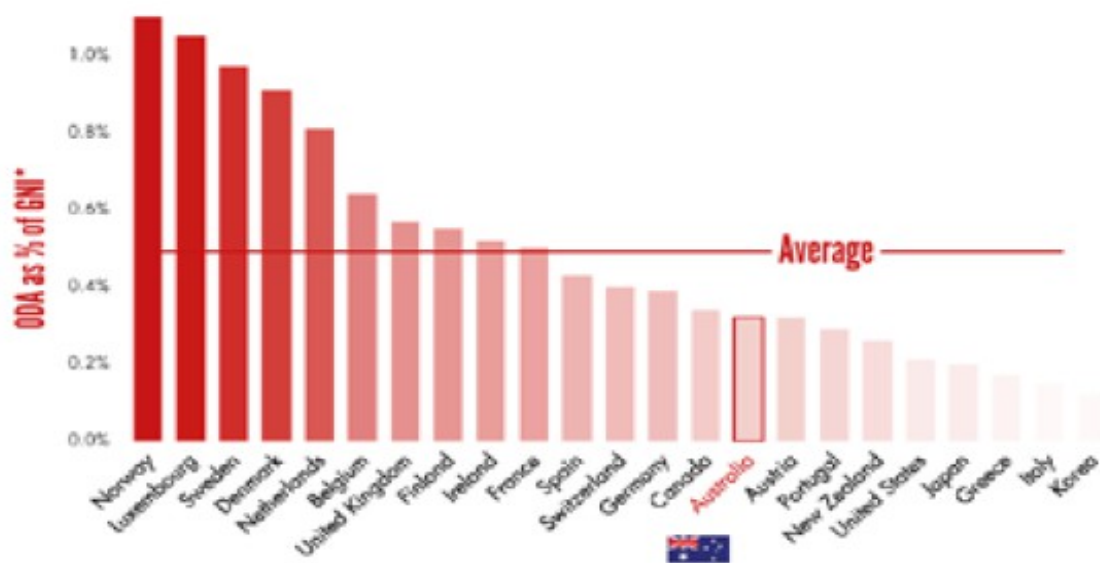
Australia has a long history of reducing conflict, both in our region and beyond. Australia has contributed 50,000 personnel to peace-keeping missions over the past 60 years and over the past decade has had important peace leadership roles in the Solomon Islands and East Timor. 4

Australia has also been an active voice in the international community advocating for conflict reduction, such as through nuclear nonproliferation, supporting landmine action, and in developing a global Arms Trade Treaty.

## Promised Aid

Australia ranks 15 out of 27 developed countries on the proportion of national income spent on overseas aid, despite our wealth and the minor impact the global financial crisis on our economy.

*Think we are a generous country? Think again...  
Australia ranks 15 out of 27 developed countries.*



There have been many global agreements to spend higher proportions of national income on overseas aid. The first global target of 1% was suggested by the World Council of Churches in 1958. In 1970, a UN resolution was passed which included a target of 0.7%. Many have already achieved this. In comparison, Australia spends just over half that on overseas aid, at 0.37% of national income.

### *We know aid works*

Australian aid has contributed to a global effort which has reduced child deaths by over 40% since 1990.

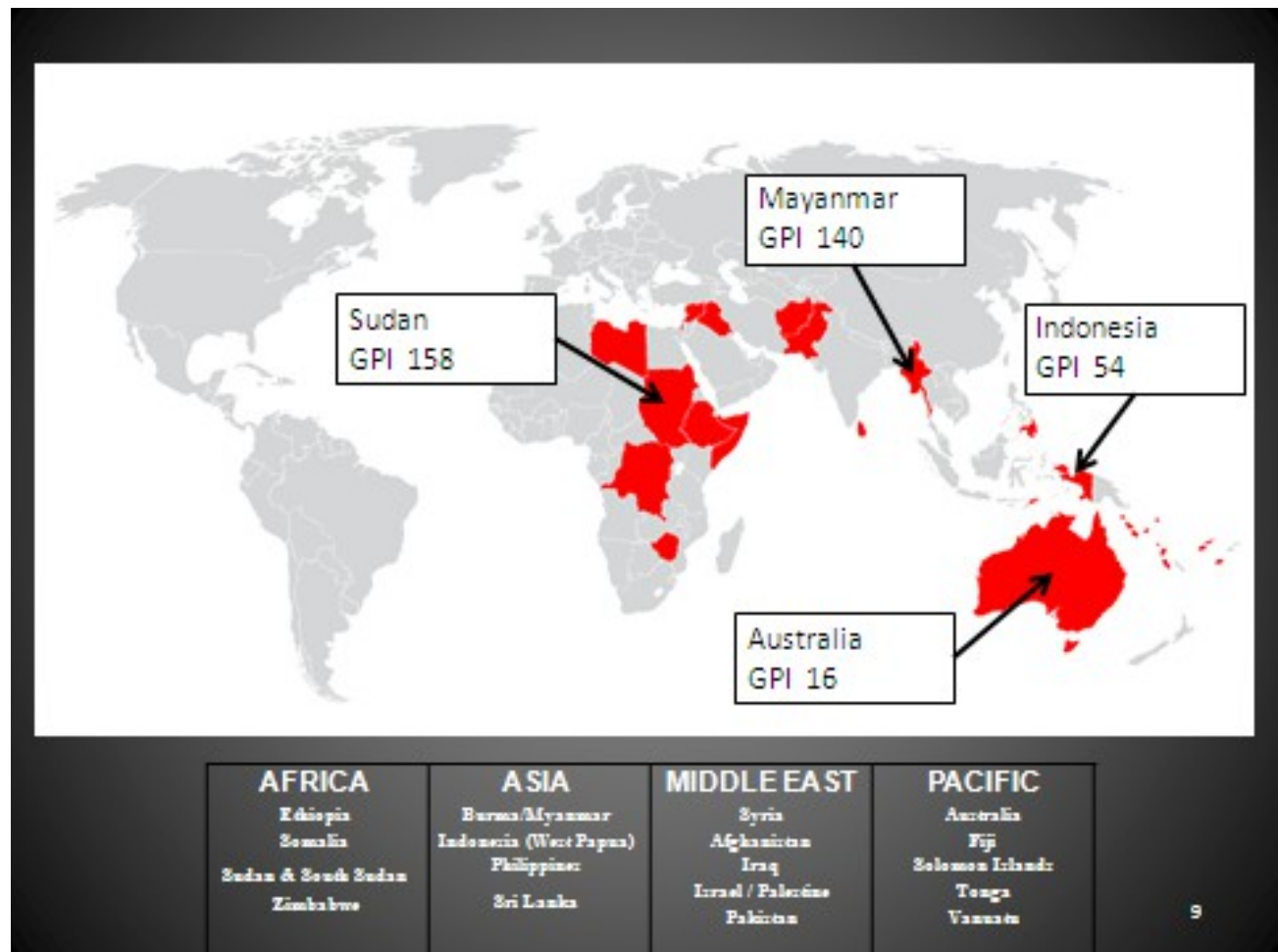
Reaching our target of 0.5% of national income on overseas aid will help give more people life-saving assistance during crisis, immunise more boys and girls, and give more children a quality education.

Where is Act for Peace working??

Let's look at 4 of these in a bit more detail - this is where our funds help 'Act for Peace' actually 'hit the ground'.

The Global Peace Index ranks the nations of the world according to 22 qualitative and quantitative indicators of peace. This measures levels of internal and external conflict, safety of citizens, and levels of militarisation.

The **lower** the score, the more peaceful the country



### Sudan: Current Situation

- 2013 Global Peace Index ranking: 158 of 162 countries
- Over 4.2 million internally displaced people
- 51 per cent of the population of South Sudan lives below the poverty line
- 250 million m<sup>2</sup> of suspected and confirmed minefields in South Sudan

After peaceful, free and fair voting in a referendum on self-determination in January 2011, in which southerners voted overwhelmingly (99 per cent of the total votes) for independence from the north, the new Africa nation of South Sudan was born on July 9. However, both the lead-up to the declaration of independence and its aftermath have been marred by bloodshed and violence. South Sudan as been born into trying circumstances. As one of the world's least developed countries, it has the worst maternal mortality rate and an illiteracy rate among women of 84 per cent.

### **Act for Peace in Sudan**

The Sudanese churches, both in the north and south, have been the main institutions for support to the people in providing relief aid and social services, with the support of Act for Peace and other ecumenical agencies.

Since the ceasefire, their disarmament partner, the Mines Advisory Group, has played an important role in achieving vital progress in mine action. This has seen more than 36,000 kilometres of roads cleared and declared open (more than 5 return trips to Perth), and 55 million m<sup>2</sup> of land cleared and released back to communities for productive use - 55 million of the 250 million affected (usual suburban house block out at Evergreen Waters is approx 500sq metres = 110,000 houses, with the total number of blocks eventually developed 700 blocks = 1 ½ times area of mines cleared)

Every year, approximately 500,000 people experience an improved quality of life due to the services supported by our project partners. This program includes:

- primary health care;
- nutrition education, hygiene promotion and other preventative healthcare sessions;
- access to water and improved sanitation quality for around 300,000 people;
- training for women, sheiks and government officials on peace-building, human rights and children's rights;
- building and restoring schools; and



- providing seeds, tools and training for farming.

### **Myanmar (Burma) - Current Situation**

- 2013 Global Peace Index ranking: 140 of 162 countries
- There are an estimated 470,000 people displaced in eastern Myanmar, with more having been displaced since the general elections held in November 2010
- 146,000 refugees live in camps along the Thai-Burma border

The people of Myanmar have lived through decades of conflict. Hundreds of thousands have fled their homeland for neighbouring Thailand, and now live in refugee camps along the Thailand–Myanmar border. Some have been living in the camps for decades.

Despite dramatic political improvements in recent years, key issues of concern remain for this fragile, conflict-affected nation. These include a lack of process for safe return to Myanmar, serious security concerns including landmines, ongoing human rights abuses, and militarisation in the areas of return.

### **Act for Peace in Myanmar**

Act for Peace supports a range of partners in Myanmar and on its borders. They are a member of The Border Consortium, which provides food, shelter, health care and other vital assistance to refugees in camps on the Thailand–Myanmar border.

Act for Peace's Partner, the Myanmar Council of Churches' Urban Rural Mission Program (URM), works to build capacity for a democratic community of the future, through developing knowledge and skills at local levels so people can advocate for themselves on issues of human rights, child protection and other justice issues.

### **Indonesia (West Papua): Current Situation**

- 2013 Global Peace Index ranking: 54 of 162 countries

The pattern of political violence in West Papua province continues to destabilise the region, as well as highlighting the need for a meaningful solution between the Papuan leadership and the Indonesian government.

Amidst the calls for self-determination and a new political identity, West Papua continues to struggle with economic, health and livelihood indicators that are amongst the worst in Indonesia.

West Papua's environment remains exposed to indiscriminate logging, mining and natural gas development affecting the environment and the land-holding status of the indigenous population.

### **Act for Peace in West Papua**

Partners with Act for Peace's in West Papua are training young Papuans to be leaders in their communities to raise awareness and help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Other training initiatives focus on business management training targeting small scale business operators, supporting productive industries within the local population including fishing, kiosk/mini markets and brick making.

- 2013 Global Peace Index ranking: 16

### **Australia: Current Situation**

#### **Act for Peace in Australia**

Act for Peace works with partners in Australia on healing initiatives which link refugees to church communities to generate support for resettled refugees and destitute asylum seekers without work rights, income or access to Medicare. The work includes:

- community building events such as visits by refugees to regional centres.
- provision of travel loans to reunite families.
- support for programs providing literacy and other skills
- financial assistance

Host families, volunteers and supporters develop networks of contacts and friendships with the newcomers, helping to create a healthy, multicultural society in Australia.

*What we can do today ...*

As a reminder of the work still needed across the world to attain Peace, we participated in an activity suggested by 'Act for Peace' by signing our name on a card dove, indicating our support, and hanging across the church over the next few weeks.



Also, there were action cards to complete that 'Act for Peace' will present to our political leaders to call on them to keep their promises on aid and to invest in peace-building projects that break the cycle of conflict and poverty. As experts at working in fragile communities – supporting refugees, protecting families from landmines, and helping people to rebuild after the violence has ended, 'Act for Peace' will use their expertise and their influence to urge our politicians to act.

This is a lot to take in, so I would encourage you to visit the website of 'Act for Peace' to see more of more of their work, with stories and pictures of some of the areas which continue to be in turmoil and conflict.

Prayer of Reflection:

**God of the dispossessed,  
defender of the helpless,  
you grieve with all the women who weep,  
because their children are no more;**

**may we also refuse to be comforted  
until the violence of the strong has been confounded,  
and the broken victims have been set free.**

**In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

(United Kingdom: Janet Morley)