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WAR ON IRAQ NEWS AND UPDATES

We may not have been able to prevent the war but we can make the Howard Government regret its reckless and contemptuous action. This is an unjust war from start to end and we are morally obliged to oppose it. ACMICA members are actively organising with local peace groups to work out our responses to the war on Iraq. We call on all supporters to mobilise and organise for protests and acts of civil disobedience. The peace movement must respond to this immoral and illegal war with its own version of "shock and awe". When war starts, rally, walk out of work, take sickies, occupy buildings, block roads, do whatever it takes.

As Catholic intellectuals there is also a longer-term pedagogical consideration. In Australia, unlike the US, there is a failure on the part of the Church to robustly engage in public debate on the issue. Issues of morality have all but been sidelined by the vulgar moral relativism of Howard and others. Fr Bruce Duncan argues that this is due to a failure of conscience formation in Australia, but also the plain incompetency by some Church leaders to critically analyse war discourse. He suggests we must work to inform Catholics about the moral issues involved, our right of conscientious objection, and how to deal with divergent views. These implications must be urgently addressed as part of an overall strategy against the war.

See Bruce Duncan, "Why the Morality of War Against Iraq Went Unreported", *ACLRI Newsletter*, Autumn 2003, http://www.aclri.catholic.org.au/publications/03_autumn/01.html;
cf. Rev Dr Peter Matheson, "On Iraq, the Churches Must Speak Out," *The Age*, 31 October 2002, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/10/30/1035683473405.html>

Emergency Anti-war Rallies

On the day war starts ...

SYDNEY: Rally 5pm, Town Hall Square the day war begins (when the bombs begin to fall, whether it is a weekday or weekend)

ADELAIDE: 5pm, Parliament House steps. Phone 0414 773 918.

BRISBANE: 5pm, King George Square. Also noon on the following Saturday at the same place. Stop the War Coalition. Phone (07) 3716 0848, 3831 2644.

CANBERRA: noon speakout at Garema Place, Civic. 5pm, rally at the US embassy, Moonah Place, Yarralumla. Also rally at noon the following day, Garema Place, Civic. ACT Network Opposing War. Phone (02) 6247 2424, 0417 269 984, 0415 752 013.

DARWIN: 5.30pm, Raintree Park, Smith Street Mall. Phone (08) 8981 4714.

GEELONG: 5pm, Market Square. Phone (03) 5222 6900.

HOBART: 4.30pm, Franklin Square, Macquarie St. Endorsed by the Peace Coalition. Phone (03) 6234 9553, 6234 6397, 0438 691 125.

LAUNCESTON: 5pm, outside Museum, Wellington St, city. Ph (03) 6327 1751.

MELBOURNE: 5pm, State Library. Youth Against War rally, meet 4.30pm Federation Square & march to State Library. Day after war starts: Unionists rally 12pm at Trades Hall. Phone (03) 9659 3582.

PERTH: 5pm, GPO, Forrest Place. NOWAR Alliance. Phone (08) 9218 9608, 9477 6301.

ROCKHAMPTON: 5pm, Col Brown Park, Victoria Parade, South Rockhampton. Ph 0419 029 168.

Sydney Emergency weekend rally

Giant rally this **SUNDAY 23RD MARCH. Assemble 12:30pm Belmore Park** (next to central station). Come early as trains will be crowded. Bring water and sunscreen.

How should a loyal lap dog be rewarded?

Negotiators from Washington and Canberra are meeting this week to initiate talks for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) – barely days after Howard formally committed Australian troops to a US war on Iraq.

Certainly this was a long time coming as Howard had begun pushing for a FTA as soon as President Bush stole the election. Yet industry and government sources have clearly linked the initiation of FTA negotiations and Howard's undying support for the US war.

"The link was raised by Australia's ambassador to the US last November, who reportedly stated to US Cattlemen Beef Association that Australia's support for a war will overcome their opposition to the US Government opening trade talks with Canberra." Marc Purcell, spokesperson of the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace (Melbourne), said.

Reuters reported from Washington: "Industry sources told Reuters that free trade for Australia has become a top priority of the Bush Administration, due partly to its eagerness to build a coalition of allies preparing to invade Iraq."

This follows the link made by US Trade Representative, Bob Zoellick, late last year when he stated: "Australia has fought with the United States in every war in the 20th century. They've been strong supporters of ours, and to me that matters."

FEATURE – "WAR: WHAT FOR?" – REFLECTIONS FROM SRI LANKA

A timely reflection by Rachel Galea from a country where the memory of war is still fresh

Time passes here in Sri Lanka. Such beauty surrounds most places here, the sweeping picturesque landscape along with the hospitable and humble people equate to an admirable culture, one which embraces difference and is home to much ethnic and religious diversity. I walk the streets and through the villages and find it difficult to comprehend that violence, fear and war resided with the people of Sri Lanka everyday for 19 years. Neighbours became enemies; friends, foes; and unsuspecting citizens, heroes. It seems that not too many people here are eager to discuss the conflict in anyway. I guess 19 years is a long time.

Many of the people here are unable to comment on the conflict because they have forgotten what it was all about ... Many people here still ask the question, what was it all for?

Here the word peace is echoed much more than war, the peace process initiated a wave of peace mongering here in Sri Lanka by a number of NGO's and community groups... Peace is the happening thing and most are eager to make it happen. Money is pouring into the country from various different foreign governments for funding of any sort of peace project – from educating the masses to peace curriculum for schools. Hordes of social infrastructure projects are being initiated across the island now spreading more confidently to the North and East of the island. Some taking advantage of the opportunity to grab funding for their own agenda but most relishing in the possibility to create positive social change.

UNICEF has just launched its newest project focusing on child soldier rehabilitation, one which I personally see as pertinent to the generation of youths who live with war as apart of their inner psyche from day to day. The task at hand here is a tough one and the road is long. The violence has ended and the killing stopped, but the country now has to reclaim its soul and reinvent its future.

Last week I visited the Army Rehabilitation Hospital in the town of Ragama. Here soldiers affected by the war come for rehabilitation. Some men visit the hospital some are permanent residents. I visited the occupational therapy ward where soldiers are trying to get back the use of various damaged parts of their bodies. Most of the men were bound to wheelchairs. Prosthetics is also produced there, and it seems they are in too much demand! Missing limbs are very common among the men, including missing eyes and missing lives. Many of the men don't have any families; no home or life to return to. Some of them are able to work others not. I also visited a ward where some of the patients live. Chatting with some of the men, they were eager to speak about Australia and the cricket. There were a few men who described their injuries and explained how they obtained their cruel fate. One young man who was in his early to mid twenties, from his wheelchair, smiled and lured me over to talk to him. He was very pleasant and had a smile that seemed to never end. His injury was a bullet slicing half of his brain, paralysing half of his body and disabling him from seeing in his left eye. He was pleased to chat. A Sri Lankan nun who was there asked him if he could have anything in the world what would it be. His smile disappeared and suddenly an age-old wisdom appeared, his one word answer "peace" echoed through my mind the whole day.

The affects of war? Not pretty at all. Many of the people here are unable to comment on the conflict because they have forgotten what it was all about. People were tired of the relentless killing, slaughter, and human suffering. Many people here still ask the question, what was it all for? Political commentators may be able to ramble on attempting to answer that question, however who is listening after the cemeteries have become too small and children lost their childhood whilst learning how to use a machine gun?

Being in a place that is trying to rebuild its nationhood upon the blood spilt of hundreds of thousands of its people, the looming threat of yet another war comes to mind. We all know that the threat of war in Iraq it is mere political banter for the powerful few, a normal day at the office. But for the millions of people that it threatens to affect, it's life and death. It's life afterwards. After the noise stops, and the flashes subside, it's returning to a home of rubble, its burying your family and living alone with disability. Its asking the question what for?

Support peace and life! Participate in the anti-war campaign and collectively dissent to war.

Rachel Galea is currently volunteering in Sri Lanka on a project co-sponsored by ACMICA

Sri Lanka, 10 March 2003

NEWS IN BRIEF –

Photos from Sri Lanka

ACMICA member Rachel Galea is currently volunteering in Sri Lanka, she shares with us some photos.



The boys during teatime



Picking chilli for cooking



Rachel helping the kids with homework