



Centre for an Ethical Society

AUSTRALIA DAY MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN MEDIA RELEASE

Australia Day: time to rethink

Australia Day is a great opportunity to celebrate what it means to be Australian, but it is even more important for Australians to focus on the opportunities and challenges which we are now confronting. As a nation are we guaranteed to mirror the best of the past or are we more likely to be seduced by our present prosperity into a more selfish and self-centred view of the world with little thought or tolerance for a leading role in the challenges that face the global community, let alone the underprivileged, especially for the indigenous population, of our nation? Are there still leaders who can and will seek the common good across the spectrum of partisanship?

There are three areas, particularly for children, which confront us on this Australia Day:

Australian Children in Need. This year more than 600,000 Australian children will grow up in homes without a living wage. Their disadvantage is magnified in an era when access to the educational and social infrastructures that most take for granted is severely restricted. In addition to the present injustice, there is a huge price to be paid later in terms of adult social dysfunction, perhaps even alienation. The prosperity of ordinary Australians, let alone the almost obscene wealth of the few, does not automatically flow on to the significant underbelly of Australian citizens. We need far more imaginative ways of reaching and including the disadvantaged young, not just for the present, but also as an investment in a cohesive future.

The International Situation for Children in Need. It is sad that Australia still contributes under half the international goal of 0.7% GDP in international aid. Each year 6 million children die around the world from hunger, thirst and preventable diseases. We compare very unfavourably with countries that exceed the international standard. Out of our prosperity why do we remain so internationally mean? The situation would be even worse were it not for the private generosity of many ordinary Australians.

Unlike military missions that have honourably become part of our ANZAC tradition, our involvement in the war in Iraq has been ill considered and four years later is still in danger of leaving the people of Iraq in an even more perilous position than they were under the dictator Saddam Hussein. The most innocent victims of this conflict, and others around the globe, have been the thousands of children who have been killed either directly or from 'collateral damage' and the thousands who have been orphaned, maimed or left without any support.

Climate Change. Climate change and global warming is increasingly on the radar screen of all world citizens, not just Australians. Despite the fact the Australian continent is likely to be more adversely affected than almost any other land mass on the planet, we remain strangely reluctant to do our part, let alone give leadership, in this most urgent of all international challenges. The reason most often given is that we cannot afford it, but the short term economic cost will be quite minor compared with the longer term financial challenge to be faced by future generations. We should ask ourselves whether our children and future generations will be pleased with our stewardship of God's Creation.

In summary, the challenge facing Australians on Australia Day 2007 is the cultivation and desire for a common good that is strong enough to prevail over the selfishness of the quest for personal prosperity and a culture of individualism.

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