



Edmund Rice Centre

Awareness. Advocacy. Action

ERC JUSTICE UPDATES

November 2023 No.98

Dear Friends,

This 98th Edition of ERCJCE Justice Updates, our regular newsletter from the Edmund Rice Centre, on matters relating to human rights, first nations, refugees and people seeking asylum and environmental justice.

As one faces this ever changing, complex, unjust and unequal world let us always remember Blessed Edmund Rice's three main tenets:

COMPASSION LIBERATION & PRESENCE

May I live this day, compassionate of heart, clear in word, gracious in awareness, courageous in thought and generous in love. John O'Donohue.

Please note that if you come up against a paywall in "any of the articles below - please contact me at: mmcinerney@edmundrice.org and I will send you the full article.

Previous editions are available at <https://www.erc.org.au/newsletters>

Peace & Blessings

Marita

Communications Project Officer,

Marita McInerney

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that there may be

articles in this publication with names and images of deceased people.

STATEMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE AND COUNTRY

Image via X

An open letter

Rachel Withers, The Monthly, October 23 2023

***All Australians should read this statement from Indigenous leaders,
regardless of how they voted***

22 October 2023

To the Prime Minister and every Member of the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Commonwealth Parliament

This is an open letter which will be circulated to the Australian public and media.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have observed a week of silence across Australia since the outcome of the Referendum last Saturday 14 October 2023. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags have flown half-mast and we have refrained from media commentary, even as politicians, governments, media commentators and analysts have spent a week exonerating – and indeed, lauding – the nobility of the 60.8 per cent of Australians who voted to reject Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia.

These are the collective insights and views of a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, community members and organisations who supported Yes:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are in shock and are grieving the result. We feel acutely the repudiation of our peoples and the rejection of our efforts to pursue reconciliation in good faith. That people who came to our country in only the last 235 years would reject the recognition of this continent's First Peoples – on our sacred land which we have cared for and nurtured for more than 65,000 years –

is so appalling and mean-spirited as to be utterly unbelievable a week following. It will remain unbelievable and appalling for decades to come.

2. We thank the 5.51 million Australians who voted Yes to recognition. This represents approximately 39.2 per cent of Australian voters on 14 October 2023. At the 2022 Federal Election the Australian Labor Party received support from 32.58 per cent of voters, the Liberal Party 23.89 per cent, the National Party 3.6 per cent and One Nation 4.96 per cent. We thank those Australians who gave Yes more support at this Referendum than they did to any political party.

3. We acknowledge the resounding Yes vote in discrete and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The high levels of support for Yes in our communities exposes the No Campaign's lies, taken up by the media even in the last week of the campaign. The situation of these communities needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

4. Australia is our country. We accept that the majority of non-Indigenous voting Australians have rejected recognition in the Australian Constitution. We do not for one moment accept that this country is not ours. Always was. Always will be. It is the legitimacy of the non-Indigenous occupation in this country that requires recognition, not the other way around. Our sovereignty has never been ceded.

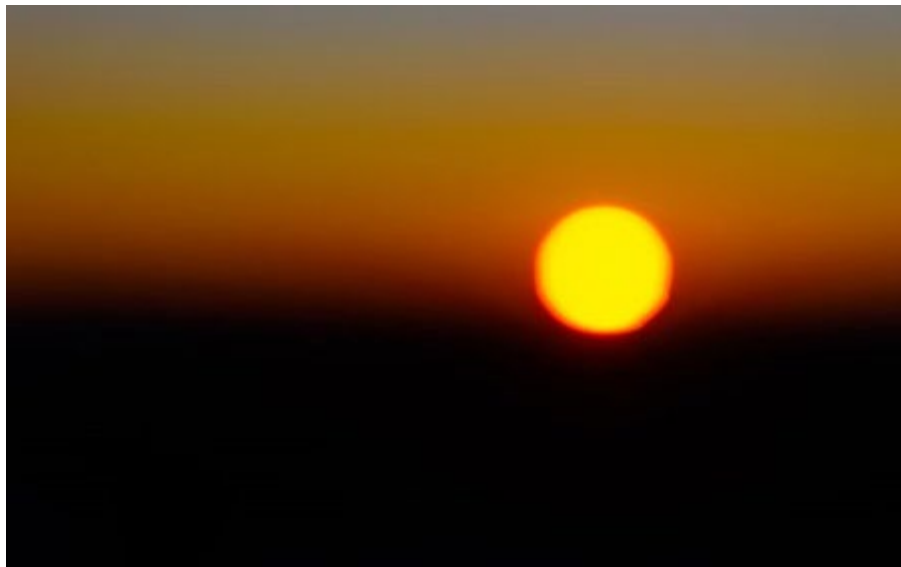
5. The Constitution still belongs to those who the founding fathers originally intended it for and remains unchanged in our exclusion. We were asked to be recognised over a decade ago; we sought to be included in a meaningful way and that has been rejected. In refusing our peoples' right to be heard on matters that affect us, Australia chose to make itself less liberal and less democratic. Our right to be heard continues to exist

Read full letter

https://ugc.production.linktr.ee/2e09849a-25e6-4743-8317-e33dfb437728_Statement-for-our-People-and-Country.pdf

Read full article

https://www.themonthly.com.au/the-politics/rachel-withers/2023/10/23/open-letter?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=The%20Politics%20%20Monday%2023%20October%202023&utm_content=The%20Politics%20%20Monday%2023%20October%202023+CID_8515ab462646dbf92318720cbe8da23e&utm_source=EDM&utm_term=Read%20on%20free&cid=8515ab462646dbf92318720cbe8da23e



What happened to Indigenous Rights? The world will judge Australia harshly

Henry Reynolds, Pearls & Irritations October 29 2023

The prolonged debate about the Voice to Parliament was dominated by the question about what rights should be accorded to our First Nations communities. It was, without doubt, the most potent argument advanced by proponents of the no case. By enshrining the Voice in the constitution, it was said, Aborigines and Islanders were to be given special rights not available to other Australians. It was, therefore, unfair and discriminatory and divided the nation. What is more it encouraged indigenous separatism which threatened national unity.

Clearly the advocates for the yes campaign failed to effectively counter these arguments. In urging the case for indigenous rights they referred to deep history and present day disabilities and inequality. But the fact that indigenous rights had been enshrined in international law from at least as far back as to the 1950's and had the support of a large majority of the world's nation states and also by most of the world's population was never employed in countless hours of discussion and debate. It was as though indigenous leaders had adopted a form of intellectual autarchy. The argument seemed to be that parochialism was the best way to proceed, that any mention of the United Nations and international law would lose rather than garner support. They may have been right but in retrospect that is by no means certain.

It is clearly the case that the voters knew less about international law than they did about the constitution. But what progress has been made in Australia up till now depended a great deal on principles brought into domestic law from outside. This was clearly the case in relation to land rights, the one area of demonstrable achievement. This was true in the case of the Northern Territory

Land Rights Act of 1976 and the High Court's Mabo Judgement in 1992. These were achievements which far outreached the modest proposals enshrined in the Uluru Statement.

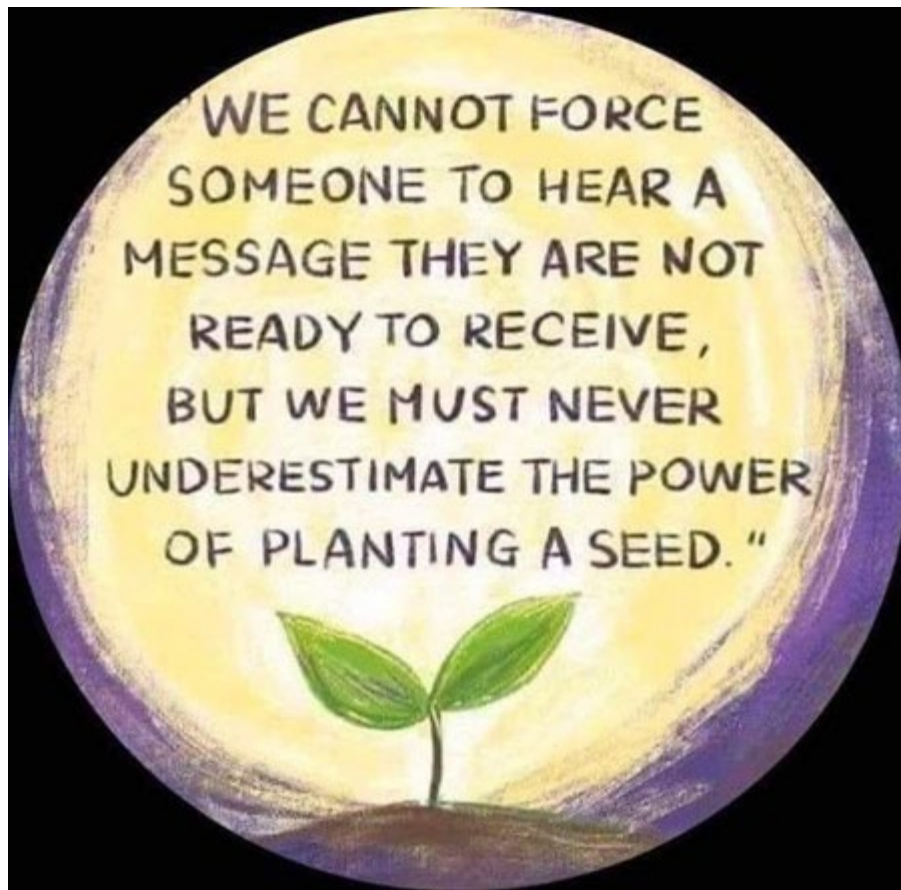
But Mabo did not bring an end to Australia's engagement with the evolution of indigenous rights. The 1990's saw the beginning of a long process of negotiation which led eventually to the presentation of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People to the General Assembly in 2007. It was introduced by the Australian Indigenous leader Les Maelzer who, at the time, was Chair of the Global Indigenous Caucus. One hundred and fifty countries supported the Declaration. The Rudd Government signed the declaration in 2009. Australia has, therefore, been committed to the principles for fourteen years. It has had bi-partisan support. Meanwhile the Law Council of Australia observed in 2019 that the Declaration was, 'the authoritative international standard informing the way governments across the globe should engage with and protect the rights of indigenous people.'

The unavoidable conclusion is that Australia has made a commitment to the rest of the world to abide by the Declaration. Yet none of the governments in power since 2009-Rudd, Gillard, Abbott, Turnbull, Morrison, or Albanese did anything to educate the electorate about what is at stake. We big note ourselves overseas and rattle on about a 'rules based international order' but at home we whisper 'don't mention the U.N.' How many times was the Declaration mentioned during the Voice debate? The only reference to it that I have found was in a front page editorial in The Age on the eve of the vote. It is worth quoting:

"Fifteen years ago, Australia endorsed an important agreement: the U.N Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous People. That Declaration asserted the rights of those people around the world to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions. It supported their self- determination and effective participation in decision- making relevant to them. By endorsing that declaration, Australia sent a message to the world's Indigenous people that it cared about their rights and their future."

Read full article

<https://johnmenadue.com/what-happened-to-indigenous-rights-the-world-will-judge-australia-harshly/>



Reopening Nauru

Editorial, The Saturday Paper, October 28–November 3 2023, No. 473

The disclosure contained fewer syllables than the number of people trapped within it. The line was as short and unwilling as a secret: “There are currently 13 on Nauru.”

Speaking at Senate estimates, Michael Thomas, a first assistant secretary in the Department of Home Affairs, explained that 11 of those people arrived last month. “Those new arrivals were taken to Nauru in September this year.”

Thomas would not say where the people were from. He refused to say if any of them were children. “Just to characterise where the process is at: the group, at the moment, are going through the initial reception processes, which include identity, immigration, health and quarantine processes, managed by the government of Nauru.”

There was less detail than even the Coalition offered during its last term. The people involved have no nationality, no gender, no age. They are faceless, a non-people invented by this dreadful system.

In the same hearings, it became clear an unknown number of people had been brought to Australia from Nauru and “detained as unlawful non-citizens”. They are locked up somewhere, with the government unable to say why.

“To be released into the community requires ministerial intervention to either

grant them a visa or place them into residence determination,” Thomas said, “so a risk assessment process is undertaken at that point to make a determination about the best placement for them.”

Labor promised this brutality during the campaign. It long ago abandoned the humanity of refugees. One of the Albanese government’s first acts in office was a boat turnback.

The argument has always been strained, a sly justification of the country’s darkest impulses. It is even less credible when the torture is done in secret. The whole point of deterrence is that it is conspicuous. Without that, it is only cruelty.

.....

The reopening of Nauru is the reopening of one of this country’s saddest wounds. It is a reminder neither Labor nor the Coalition has any real plan for refugees. All they have is a numb agreement to keep doing what they have spent the past few decades doing, trading lives for the narrowest of electoral gains.

Read full Editorial (subscribers)

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/comment/editorial/2023/10/28/reopening-nauru>

For full copy of Editorial contact me: mmcinerney@edmundrice.org



Port Moresby from the air. Papua New Guinea’s government is to investigate allegations of corruption in the Australia-funded refugee support program. Photograph: Robert Weber/The Guardian

PNG to investigate corruption claims in Australia-funded refugee program

Ben Doherty, The Guardian, 31 October 2023

Papua New Guinea’s immigration minister John Rosso says whistleblower’s

‘serious allegations’ revealed by the Guardian have prompted audit

Allegations of widespread corruption and mismanagement within the Australia-funded refugee support program in Papua New Guinea will be formally investigated by the Port Moresby government.

After allegations from a whistleblower inside PNG’s immigration authority that millions of dollars had potentially been misused, PNG’s deputy prime minister, also the minister for immigration, John Rosso, has ordered an audit into where the money has gone.

“The serious allegations by the whistleblower, separate complaints raised by other parties, the local and international media coverage on it, and the undertaking by the Australian government to investigate the program, requires our government to carry out our own audit into the arrangement,” Rosso said.

.....

Australia funded PNG’s humanitarian program through a contract signed in 2021 by the then Morrison government, which was kept secret at the time and the details of which the Albanese government still refuses to reveal.

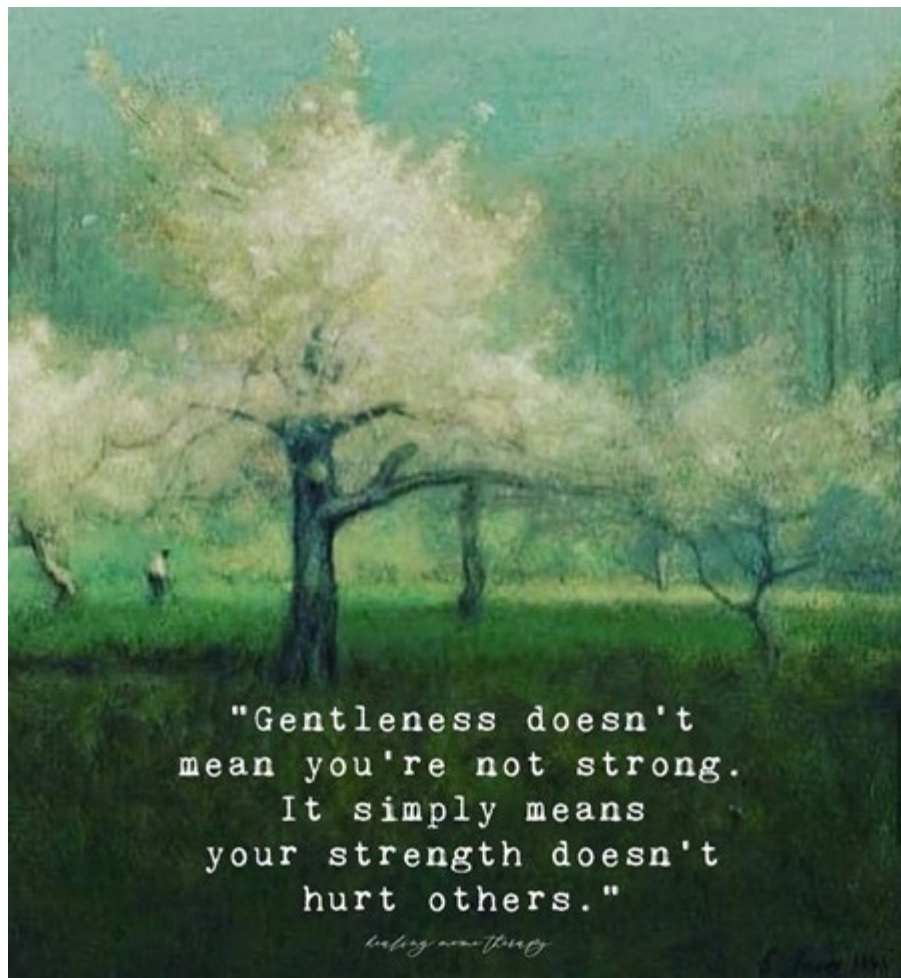
The agreement was to provide accommodation, health and other support services for refugees exiled to PNG by Australia as part of the offshore detention regime formerly run on Manus Island, before that centre was ordered shut by the PNG supreme court.

Most of the 64 remaining refugees and asylum seekers – the final cohort from the Manus detention centre – have been held in PNG for a decade and are in poor physical and mental health.

PNG’s chief migration officer Hulahau has said PNG plans for the majority of refugees – about 40 – to be resettled in New Zealand, while 16, who are dangerously unwell and in need of high-level medical care – will be flown to Australia for treatment. About 10 of the refugees and asylum seekers have expressed a desire to stay in PNG – most of these because they have married PNG nationals and have families.

Read full story:

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/31/png-corruption-claims-investigation-australia-funded-refugee-program-papua-new-guinea?utm_term=65409d6168283b7ba7095c101c516126&utm_campaign=AfternoonUpdateAUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=afternoonupdateau_email



The Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map includes figures on climate development financing for the first time.

Photograph: robertharding/Alamy

Australia's support to Pacific surges as China focuses on 'friendly' states, aid map shows

Jon Letman, The Guardian, 31 October 2023

Lowy Institute report finds Canberra has become leading source of loans to

region while Beijing's financing is 'strategically targeted'

Australia dramatically increased its overall support to the Pacific in 2021, while Beijing is targeting its development financing to “the most China-friendly Pacific island states”, the latest Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map shows.

The map, released on Tuesday, also revealed that at a time of elevated debt sustainability risks in the Pacific, Australia has become the leading source of loans and contributed to a surge in infrastructure support.

“Australia looks set to become the region's dominant infrastructure financier, having committed an additional \$780m in new projects,” the Lowy Institute research associate and map co-producer, Riley Duke, said.

The map draws on more than 70m data points, from publicly available documents and other sources, to track the flow of aid and development funds to the region. The 14 Pacific Island nations tracked received a record \$4.8bn in official development finance (ODF) in 2021.

Alexandre Dayant, a Lowy Institute research fellow and project director of the Pacific Aid Map, said the map revealed a “new era” of development financing with supporting nations introducing new financing instruments. In the past, Pacific development financing relied heavily on grants from donors for governance and human development. This has shifted, with donors increasing their use of direct budget support and loans to deliver ODF, the Lowy Institute said. This type of funding shift can increase debt sustainability risks for the region, the institute added.

Australia is the Pacific's largest development partner, disbursing \$17bn between 2008 and 2021, making up nearly 40% of the region's ODF. The Lowy Institute said Australia's high level of ODF support to the Pacific was “followed at a distance

In 2021, Australia committed \$1.89bn in ODF – up from \$968m in 2020 and \$1.34bn in 2019. Australia extended a \$466m loan to Papua New Guinea in 2021, making it the largest transaction ever recorded in the Pacific Aid Map.

The 77% increase in Australia's infrastructure commitments in the Pacific comes as Pacific Island governments need “significant external support” to build new and maintain existing roads, ports and telecommunications infrastructure, Duke said.

Read full article:

https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/31/australias-support-to-pacific-surges-as-china-focuses-on-friendly-states-aid-map-shows?utm_term=65400b716ad2f92484242c3f27f2a84f&utm_campaign=MorningMailAUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=morningmailau_email



Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. Image: Vatican News

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem's letter to the entire diocese

Pierbattista Cardinal Pizzaballa, Catholic Outlook, 25 October 2023

Letter to the entire diocese

24 October 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

We are going through one of the most difficult and painful periods in our recent times and history. For over two weeks now, we have been inundated with images of horrors, which have reawakened ancient traumas, opened new wounds, and made pain, frustration and anger explode within all of us. Much seems to speak of death and endless hatred. So many 'whys' overlap in our minds, adding to our sense of bewilderment.

The whole world views this Holy Land of ours as a place that is a constant cause of wars and divisions. That is precisely why it was good that a few days ago, the whole world joined us with a day of prayer and fasting for peace. It was a beautiful view of the Holy Land and an important moment of unity with our Church. And that view is still there. Next October 27th, the Pope has called for a second day of prayer and fasting, so that our intercession may continue. It will be a day that we will celebrate with conviction. It is perhaps the main thing we Christians can do at this time: pray, do penance, intercede. For this, we thank the Holy Father from the bottom of our hearts.

In all this uproar where the deafening noise of the bombs is mixed with the many voices of sorrow and the many conflicting feelings, I feel the need to share with you a word that has its origin in the Gospel of Jesus. That is the starting point which we set out from, and return to, time and time again: a word from the Gospel to help us live this tragic moment by uniting our feelings with those of Jesus.

Looking to Jesus, of course, does not mean feeling exempt from the duty to

speak, to denounce, to call out, as well as to console and encourage. As we heard in last Sunday's Gospel, it is necessary to render "to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." (Matt. 22:21). Looking to God, we therefore want, first of all, to render to Caesar what is his.

My conscience and moral duty require me to state clearly that what happened on October 7th in southern Israel is in no way permissible and we cannot but condemn it. There is no reason for such an atrocity. Yes, we have a duty to state this and to denounce it. The use of violence is not compatible with the Gospel, and it does not lead to peace. The life of every human person has equal dignity before God, who created us all in His image.

The same conscience, however, with a great burden on my heart, leads me to state with equal clarity today that this new cycle of violence has brought to Gaza over five thousand deaths, including many women and children, tens of thousands of wounded, neighborhoods razed to the ground, lack of medicine, lack of water and of basic necessities for over two million people. These are tragedies that cannot be understood and which we have a duty to denounce and condemn unreservedly.

Finally, let us pray for all innocent victims. The suffering of the innocent before God has a precious and redemptive value because it is united with the redemptive suffering of Christ. May their suffering bring peace ever closer!

We are approaching the solemnity of the Queen of Palestine, the patroness of our diocese. The shrine was erected during another time of war, and was chosen as a special place to pray for peace. In these days we will once again reconsecrate our Church and our land to the Queen of Palestine! I ask all churches around the world to join the Holy Father and to join us in prayer, and in the search for justice and peace.

We will not be able to gather all together this year, because the situation does not allow it. But I am sure that the whole diocese will be united on that day in prayer and in solidarity for peace, not worldly peace, but the peace which Christ gives us.

With sincere prayers for all,
+Pierbattista Card. Pizzaballa
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

Read full Letter

<https://catholicoutlook.org/latin-patriarch-of-jerusalems-letter-to-the-entire-diocese/>



Eve Altman, one of the organisers of vigils by the Jewish community in Sydney and Melbourne calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

‘Ceasefire now’: Australian Jewish group holds vigils for peace in Sydney and Melbourne

Caitlin Cassidy, The Guardian, 1 November 2023

Organisers hope gatherings will give a voice to ‘values’ not reflected in mainstream discussions

They gathered in coats and scarves in the dwindling light on a little hill in Bondi, a coalition of 100 or so, accompanied by dogs and children.

The decision to gather in public on Wednesday night was a deliberate one to highlight the first Jewish grouping in Australia to call for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, the release of hostages and freedom and justice for all in Israel and Palestine. A similar gathering in St Kilda, Melbourne echoed the call for peace.

Eve Altman, one of the people who organised the gathering in Sydney, said the idea for a vigil had spurred from grassroots conversations with friends in the Jewish community.

They expected no more than a dozen. But supporters continued to get on board until numbers exceeded 150 in the two cities. “These are really horrific and difficult times,” she told the crowd.

“I’ve personally had a number of conversations over the last few weeks with people in our community who are feeling really isolated right now ... who haven’t seen their values, a call to end violence and protect civilian life, reflected in mainstream discussions about this war.

“That is what motivated us to organise this vigil and this Kaddish tonight ... we’re not alone, and if we work together we can push for change.”

Since conflict broke out in Israel on 7 October, 1,400 Israelis have been killed

and 200 have been taken hostage. More than 8,000 Palestinians have been killed.

Altman said the events of the past weeks had filled the Jewish community with sadness and worry yet many had also felt “alone in this grief”. “As a community a lot of Jews don’t want the grief we are still feeling to be used justification for taking innocent lives,” she said.

.....
“It’s very hard to see from the diaspora and the outside that solidarity work is possible ... as Jews, we feel lost in this political space, but fundamentally, this is the starting point ... we’ll never be able to have a free future without peace.”

As the vigil concluded, the sky had darkened. Still visible was a painted sign lit by torchlight. “Ceasefire now,” it read.

Read full article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/01/ceasefire-now-australian-jewish>

REFLECTIONS

“

Somehow we must keep hope alive –
a hope that we can find a way to
educate all, alleviate poverty, assuage
anger, and live in harmony
with the environment, with animals,
and with each other.

- Dr. Jane Goodall

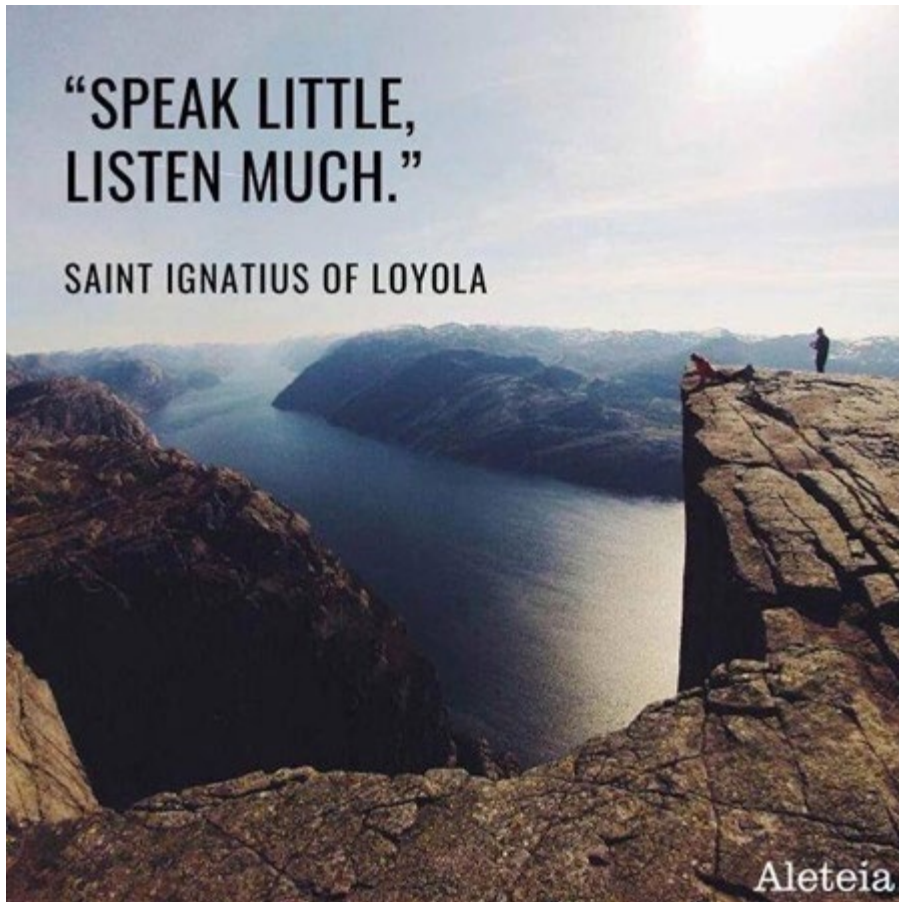


the Jane Goodall Institute

©Michael Christopher Brown / Magnum Photos

**“SPEAK LITTLE,
LISTEN MUCH.”**

SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA



"Let us develop respect for all living things. Let us try to replace violence



and intolerance with understanding and compassion. And love." - Jane Goodall

Pace - e - Bene Nonviolence Inspirations

"We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things came into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us."

Thomas Berry, "The Wild and the Sacred," in The Great Work

"I am convinced that peace is no more than an empty word unless it is founded on truth, built up in justice, animated and perfected by charity, and attained in freedom."

Pope Francis, Against War: Building a Culture of Peace

"Our hearts are breaking. And, still we celebrate those who are lighting candles of hope even as we must curse the darkness." David Hart

“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.”

Rachel Carson



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the traditional owners and custodians of the land. We commit ourselves to actively work alongside them for reconciliation and justice. We pay our respects to the Elders; past, present and future. As we take our next step we remember the first footsteps taken on this sacred land.

The Edmund Rice Centre wholeheartedly supports and endorses the
ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART
and urges all Australians to get behind this wonderful statement