



**Edmund Rice Centre**

Awareness. Advocacy. Action

## **ERC JUSTICE UPDATES**

**February 2024 No.103**

Dear Friends,

This 103rd 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 we begin 2024 let us pray and hope that peace may come and remember always Blessed Edmund Rice's three main tenets:  
**COMPASSION LIBERATION & PRESENCE**

**"Active hope is waking up to the beauty of life on whose behalf we can act.  
We belong to this world." Joanna Macy**

Please note that if you come up against a paywall in "any of the articles below - please contact me at: [mmcinerney@edmundrice.org](mailto: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.*



Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG and Pat Anderson AO ( Image: Lowitja O'Donoghue Collection)

## **Tributes flow for Indigenous land rights and health trailblazer, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue**

***Dechlan Brennan, National Indigenous Times, February 4 2024***

***WARNING:*** *This story contains the name and image of an Aboriginal person who has passed.*

Proud Yankunytjatjara woman and Indigenous land rights activist, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG, has passed away on Kurna Country, aged 91.

Dr O'Donoghue, a trailblazer for Indigenous rights and who dedicated her life to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, died peacefully on Sunday with her immediate family by her side.

Once described by Cape York community leader Noel Pearson as "the greatest Aboriginal leader of the modern era ... the rock who steadied us in the storm," Dr O'Donoghue was pivotal in the advancement of Indigenous causes and was prevalent during some of the most historic moments in modern Aboriginal affairs; including the 1967 Referendum; the Native Title legislation in 1993; and the National Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008.

Dr O'Donoghue's niece, Deb Edwards, described her as "the Matriarch of our family, whom we have loved and looked up to our entire lives".

"We adored and admired her when we were young and have grown up full of never-ending pride as she became one of the most respected and influential Aboriginal leaders this country has ever known," Ms Edwards said.

.....

Ms Edwards urged people to continue the work, activism and commitment to Indigenous people she displayed her entire life.

***"We ask that you continue to honour Aunty Lowitja's legacy through using your Voices to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to share the stories of her incredible life, which always had our First Peoples at the heart of all that she worked for and achieved," she said.***

**Read full story:**

<https://nit.com.au/04-02-2024/9609/the-rock-who-steadied-us-in-the-storm-dr-lowitja-odonoghue-indigenous-land-rights-and-health-trailblazer-passes-away>



Image: Mick Tsikas (AAP)

## **Governments "continue to waste" National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Productivity Commission reports**

***Giovanni Torre, National Indigenous Times, February 6 2024***

The Commission found governments across Australia have largely not fulfilled their commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and has made four recommendations to drive progress in its new report, released February 7.

The [final report](#) of the Commission's first three-yearly review of government action on the National Agreement found governments have "failed to fully grasp the nature and scale of change" needed to meet the obligations they signed up to under the agreement.

Commissioner Natalie Siegel-Brown said most government actions and plans to implement the agreement to date "re-label business-as-usual, or simply

tweak existing ways of working".

"The agreement can and should be a blueprint for real reform, but governments will need to move beyond business as usual and address the entrenched attitudes, assumptions and ways of working that are preventing progress," she said.

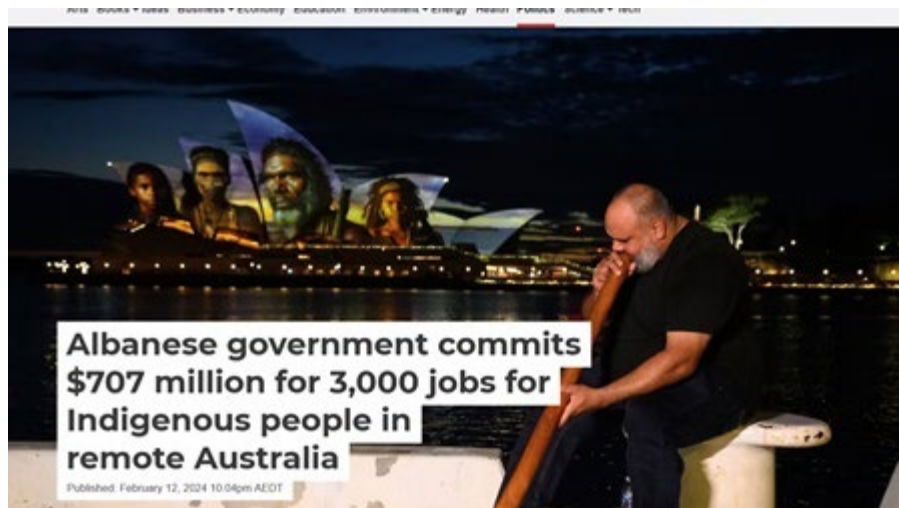
Over the course of the review, the Productivity Commission held 235 meetings, including 136 meetings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; received 101 submissions, including 51 submissions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; and held seven virtual roundtables to discuss priority policy areas.

The review found progress to implement the National Agreement's reforms was "weak", and that "disparate actions and ad hoc changes" had not led to noticeable improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The report makes four recommendations to government: share power; recognise and support Indigenous Data Sovereignty; fundamentally rethink mainstream government systems and culture; and implement stronger accountability.

**Read full article:**

<https://nit.com.au/06-02-2024/9618/the-national-agreement-on-closing-the-gap-is-an-opportunity-governments-cannot-continue-to-waste>



DAN HIMBRECHTS/AAP

## **Albanese government commits \$707 million for 3,000 jobs for Indigenous people in remote Australia**

***Michelle Gratten, The Conversation, February 12 2024***

The Albanese government will commit \$707 million for a new Remote Jobs program that will create 3,000 jobs over the next three years.

In its first major Indigenous affairs initiative since the defeat of the referendum

last year, the government says this is the initial step in replacing the widely-criticised Community Development Program (CDP) with “real jobs, proper wages, and decent conditions”.

On Tuesday the government will release a report for 2023 on closing the gap and its implementation plan for 2024. Jobs will be a centrepiece of the new initiatives but there will be other measures including on health and connectivity.

Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney said the new program would “put communities in the driver’s seat to create local jobs and businesses”.

“For too long, people in remote communities have missed out on economic opportunities and have been stuck in cycles of poverty,” she said.

“People in remote communities should have access to the benefits and dignity of work – for themselves, their families and the next generation.”

The government says the program, starting in the second half of this year, will be “grounded in self-determination”, allowing communities to decide what jobs are created, such as in community services and the care sector, hospitality and tourism, horticulture and retail.

There will be a new \$185 million Community Jobs and Business Fund to which local and community-owned businesses can apply to finance equipment and capital needs.

The jobs program will be implemented in partnership with Indigenous people, with the government stressing “it will be about remote communities deciding what will make the biggest difference locally”. It won’t be “a one-size-fits-all program”.

**Read full article:**

<https://theconversation.com/albanese-government-commits-707-million-for-3-000-jobs-for-indigenous-people-in-remote-australia-223336>





Gaza has been the deadliest conflict for children in modern times.(Reuters: Ibraheem Abu Mustafa)

**Children are bearing the brunt of the horrors in Gaza. How can this go on?**

***John Lyons, ABC News from Jerusalem, 12 February 2024***

***The most dangerous place in the world to be a child.***

That devastating description is now being applied to Gaza by UNICEF as the true extent of the catastrophe of this war emerges.

That devastation is leading to one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time — where, for example, a nurse has had to perform emergency caesarean

operations on six dead pregnant women to try to save their babies.

The horrors of Gaza are almost unspeakable. As difficult as all this is to read and to watch, it's important the world does not look away.

Rarely, if ever, have so many children been killed, injured or orphaned as quickly as Israel is doing so in Gaza right now.

***"The Gaza Strip is the most dangerous place in the world to be a child," says UNICEF's James Elder. "And day after day, that brutal reality is reinforced."***

UNICEF has compiled a range of statistics from Gaza. It says that a Palestinian child is killed every 15 minutes. Thousands more are missing under rubble.

One of every 10 children killed in Gaza did not make their first birthday. More than 1,000 children have lost one or both legs. Save the Children estimates that more than 10 children a day are losing one or both legs. Those having limbs amputated are having it done without anaesthetic.

On the testimony of a range of credible agencies, this is the deadliest conflict for children in modern times.

According to UNICEF, there are now at least 19,000 orphans in Gaza and thousands who have lost one parent.

According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, at least 28,000 Palestinians have been killed — including 11,500 children.

Gaza has more children than almost anywhere else — 47.3 per cent of its population is under 18. The Health Ministry says there are at least 65,636 injured people in Gaza – of which 18,000 are children.

Israel's newspaper Haaretz ran the headline:

***"11,500 Children Have Been Killed in Gaza. Horror of This Scale Has No Explanation."***

**Read full story:**

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-12/gaza-children-most-dangerous-place/103453292fbclid=IwAR32bGuVttGdbsJ9jnSF3XOce6L5oL2rfSJtLW6hxxQFzr5W9Lm1eXkeEjY>

**CALL TO ACTION:**

**TAKE ACTION** to help end the war in Gaza at:

<https://erc.good.do/helpendthewaringaza/Email-to-Representatives/>



Image: Markus Spiske/Unsplash

**“Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented”**

***Tony Magliano, Catholic Outlook, 1 February 2024***

In his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, the late Elie Wiesel, reflecting on the Holocaust, and his personal experience of it – being in the same World War II Nazi concentration camps where his mother, father, and sister were murdered, and coming very close to being executed himself – voiced these profound words:

“I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe”.

Several years ago, I interviewed Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, retired auxiliary bishop of Detroit. Bishop Gumbleton, 94, was one of the principal authors of the U.S. bishops’ prophetic 1983 pastoral letter “The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response.”

During our conversation, the following point jumped out at me, and continues to remain with me. Bishop Gumbleton said, “Most Catholics are more influenced by the culture than the Gospel.” I then asked him, “Would you say that about your brother bishops as well?” Without hesitation, he replied, “Absolutely!”

Clearly, it appears that most Catholics are not actively engaged – from a Gospel/Catholic social teaching perspective – in the life and death issues facing humanity like hunger and poverty, the arms trade and war, environmental degradation and climate change, the death penalty and abortion.

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It does us good to reflect again on the profound words of Elie Wiesel, “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

**Read full article:**

<https://catholicoutlook.org/silence-encourages-the-tormentor-never-the-tormented/>



## **Pope Francis would find PNG refugee conditions an eye-opener**

***Mark Gaetani, Pearls & Irritations, February 11 2024***

*In December, an impressive young Papua New Guinean named Jason Siwat, the director of the refugee program for the Catholic Bishops Conference of PNG and the Solomon Islands, travelled to Canberra bearing two important documents.*

The first was a letter from the bishops to Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil asking the government to urgently bring to Australia a group of refugees, now 57 following some acceptances by New Zealand, who been taken to the capital of Port Moresby from the Australian-run Manus Island detention facility in late 2021.

The arrangement was made between the PNG government, led by Prime Minister James Marape who visits Canberra this week, and the Morrison government. Details of the “confidential bilateral agreement” have not been made public, despite pressure on the Albanese government and claims of contractual irregularities and a lack of transparency at both ends.

Dennis Richardson’s review of the management of regional processing procurement by the Department of Home Affairs is keenly awaited.

The second document Mr Siwat carried was a survey of the living conditions of several hundred refugees and asylum seekers from the Indonesian province of West Papua, formerly Irian Jaya.

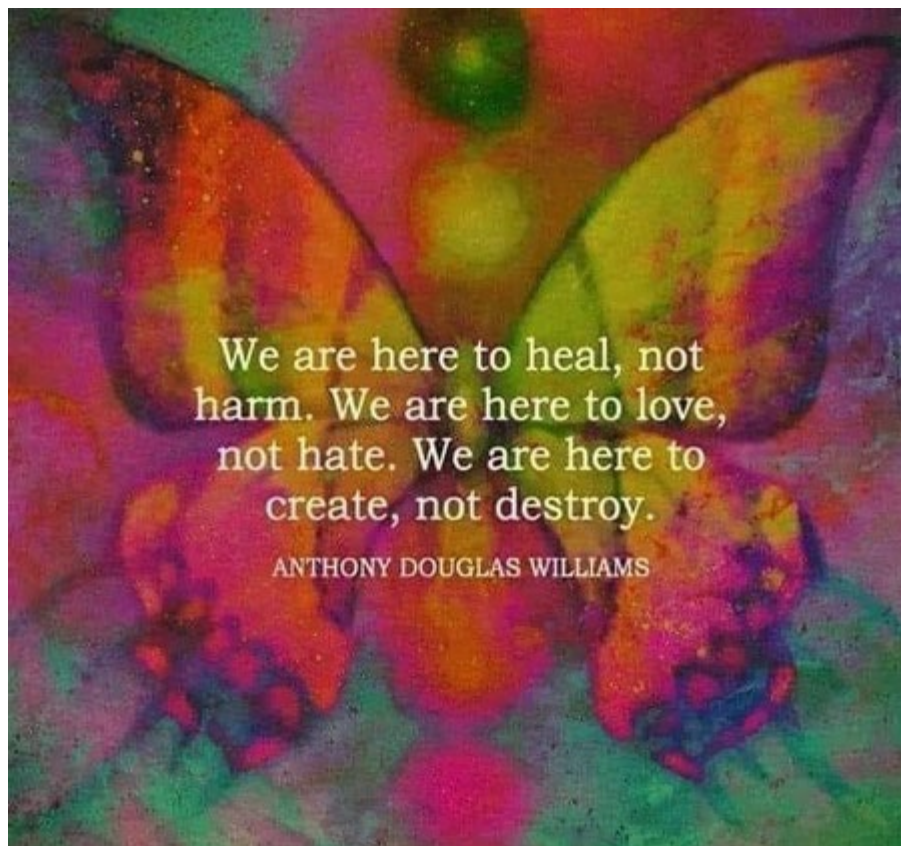
Living, or more accurately existing, in Port Moresby, they are a tiny proportion of the estimated 15,000 people who have fled to PNG over several decades to escape social exclusion, racism and the frequent brutality of Jakarta's military.

As Mr Siwat said during his visit to St Vincent de Paul Society's national office, most of the West Papuans live in remote jungle camps close to the border that divides the island of New Guinea from north to south. Easier to visit are those in the capital where Mr Siwat's team went shanty to shanty, documenting health needs, hygiene and nutritional shortcomings, and lack of educational and work opportunities.

'They live in one of the most unhygienic and destitute conditions that you can find anywhere in Oceania and the Pacific that host refugees,' the damning report said. The many privations included 21 families sharing one toilet and one tap, with people sleeping on cardboard. There was flooding, health problems were rife, unemployment was gauged to be 80 per cent.

**Read full story:**

<https://johnmenadue.com/pope-francis-would-find-png-refugee-conditions-an-eye-opener/>





Hokule'a, a Polynesian double-hulled voyaging canoe (Tara Molle/US Coast Guard)

Published 30 Jan 2024 Migration Pacific Islands

## **Visa-free travel: A chance to reignite the Pacific voyage**

***Damian Kelly, Lowy Institute The Interpreter, 29 January 2024***

### ***Barriers to the movement of people split up the regional family.***

Voyaging is a fundamental part of the Pacific. It ties Pasifika peoples, cultures and economies together across thousands of years of history. The tradition of voyaging remains alive via organisations such as the Polynesian Voyaging Society, which commenced modern voyages in the 1970s. The Polynesian Voyaging Society's vessel Hōkūle'a was the first in the modern era to use traditional knowledge to navigate across national borders, successfully crossing the ocean from Hawai'i to Tahiti in 1975. In 2023, the Hōkūle'a commenced its latest voyage, a four-year circumnavigation of the Pacific.

There are other ways to experience the Pacific voyage, or rather the effect of the voyage, such as through the Pacific diaspora. This is evident in cross-border familial ties and via diaspora communities in cities such as Cairns and Auckland.

Despite this history and the importance of voyaging to Pacific Islands peoples, there are limits on their ability to travel. The Henley Passport Index indicates that Pacific Islander peoples are more limited by visa requirements compared with their near neighbours, Australia and New Zealand. These limits are typified by reciprocity issues and unequal regional travel that could be alleviated with visa-free travel or a Pacific common travel area. Indeed, Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Biman Prasad declared only last month that there was "not a chance" of an economically integrated Pacific

without the visa-free movement of people.

**Read full article:**

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/visa-free-travel-chance-reignite-pacific-voyage#msdyntrid=MV8H01bXr9VvILxpT9XSbuW44NrXugXMZBd8xRhAJII>



Cezary Wojtkowski, ShutterstockCezary Wojtkowski, Shutterstock

## **Climate change will strike Australia's precious World Heritage sites – and Indigenous knowledge is a key defence**

***Jess Melbourne-Thomas, Brenda Lin, Lance Syme & Mandy Hopkins, The Conversation, 6 February 2024***

From Kakadu to Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef, to Sydney Opera House and the convict sites, Australia's list of World Heritage places is incredibly diverse. Each site represents the culture, nature and history of this land, in its own way.

But climate change threatens these sites. Many heritage values are already being eroded. On-ground managers of these and other protected places need practical guidance on how to understand these impacts and respond effectively.

We developed a climate change "toolkit" for World Heritage properties with site managers and Traditional Owners. To our knowledge, it is the first time such guidance has been co-developed and tested with World Heritage property managers and Indigenous experts in this country.

Bringing climate science and Indigenous knowledge systems together promises to produce better results for heritage protection as the climate changes. And there is no time to waste. We must act fast to address these threats to Australia's unique and special places of global significance, so their World Heritage values can be enjoyed for generations to come.



## ***Mounting climate threats to heritage***

Our new research explored climate impacts at three very different sites:

- Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory
- Australian Convict Sites, scattered around the country
- Willandra Lakes Region, southwest New South Wales.

The vast tropical Kakadu National Park is one of four Australian properties listed for both outstanding cultural and natural values. Cave paintings, rock carvings and archaeological sites date back tens of thousands of years. Tidal flats, floodplains, lowlands and plateaus provide habitat for many rare or endemic plants and animals.

The Convict Sites consist of 11 properties around Australia. Fremantle Prison lies 5,500km west of Arthur's Vale Historic Area in the east. The Old Great North Road in the north is 1,500km from the Port Arthur Historic Site in the south.

Many convict sites are on coasts and islands where wave action and sea level rise are increasingly damaging structures, landscapes and cultural materials. Convict sites are also vulnerable to storms and bushfires because the buildings are so old.

The arid Willandra Lakes Region contains fossil remains of a series of lakes and sand formations, along with archaeological evidence of human occupation dating back 45,000–60,000 years. Hot and dry conditions are causing erosion of topsoil, increasingly exposing Aboriginal cultural heritage.

**Read full article:**

<https://theconversation.com/climate-change-will-strike-australias-precious-world-heritage-sites-and-indigenous-knowledge-is-a-key-defence-222393?>

## **REFLECTIONS**



“Every moment  
and every event of  
every man’s life on  
earth plants some-  
thing in his soul.

For just as the  
wind carries thousands  
of winged seeds, so each moment  
brings with it germs of spiritual  
vitality that come to rest  
imperceptibly in the minds and wills  
of men. Most of these unnumbered  
seeds perish and are lost because  
men are not prepared to receive  
them. For such seeds as these cannot  
spring up anywhere, except in the  
good soil of freedom, spontaneity and  
love.”

Thomas Merton

themethodicanarchist





**Artistic Freedom: Facebook Post 11 February 2024**

***“I am Jewish. My neighbor Zahia is Palestinian Muslim. Today, I brought her baklava, a homemade tea blend and homemade soap, and a large orchid. She took me into her arms and we cried. We talked for a long long time. Her husband served me arabic coffee and she served me stuffed grape leaves. They sent me home with more grape leaves, lamb for Greg, a kaffiyeh, and their last bag of cardamom coffee from Palestine. They talked about how nice Greg is for shoveling their snow. She said she would make kenafe ( my favorite Palestinian desert)for me.***

***Stop making change theoretical and abstract. It is knocking on neighbor’s doors and sharing coffee and sweets. It is telling each other stories. It is heart to heart, neighbor to neighbor. We are all human. We all want a place to call home and for our babies and grandmothers to be safe. Peace begins with me.***  
“



### **Pace - e - Bene Nonviolence Inspirations**

***"There were times when it would have been easy to fall apart or to go in the opposite direction, but somehow I felt that if I took one more step, someone would come along to join me."*** Rosa Parks

***"There can be no growth if we do not remain open and vulnerable to what is new and different. I have never seen anyone take a risk for growth that was not rewarded a thousand times over."***

John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*

***"Gandhi had a strong belief that all people can shape and guide their lives according to the highest ideals, no matter how insignificant and powerless they might feel themselves to be. Gandhi lived his life, from childhood on, as someone convinced that his decisions about how to live mattered and that he had the power to make those decisions conform to what he believed right."*** Sissela Bok, in the foreword to *Gandhi: An*

*Autobiography—the Story of My Experiments With Truth*

***"Listening was an essential skill for the Peace Force. The work of peace***

***required the ability to pay attention in a deep way, to not interrupt, and to hear what was said and left unsaid.”*** Rivera Sun, *The Crown of Light*

***“Humanity is sympathy with infinite differences, with utter individualism, with complete differentiation, and it is only possible through the mystery of organic spiritual union. We have come, most of us, now, to a sort of physical union by sympathy and imagination. To torture even an enemy’s body would be to us physical pain, physical sickness. There will come the day when to hurt mentally and spiritually will be equally impossible, because the spiritual life will by enhanced sympathy be one. But this union is only possible through that organic differentiation that makes us have need one of the other.”*** Jane Ellen Harrison, “Heresy and Humanity”



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.