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Indigenous
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NATSIEC Newsletter

December 2011

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This is the newsletter of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) which is a commission of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA).

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Words from the National Director

As the new NATSIEC National Director, I extend my warmest greetings. I look forward to making many new and renewing old connections for the future work.

I acknowledge and give respects to the traditional custodians of the country on which I am working. I also give tribute to my predecessors upon whose pathways and storylines I anticipate walking and adding further layers of significance.

I am Koenpal, Yuggerra and Undanbi from Stradbroke Islands, adjacent coastal and wider Brisbane, also with Celtic heritage.

It is now two months since beginning this role and entering a period of discernment. To use an island term, I've been *trawling the deep* to glean the ways forward. This early trawling brought reflections on Luke 5 and John 20 and their lessons about relationship, respect, doing differently and going deeper. It illustrates also a process of renewal, healing and restoration for the fishermen.

Renewal, healing and restoration feature prominently for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Despite increased adverse circumstances and suffering, there are vibrant and achieving communities looking forward and working hard to overcome. One day the statistics of Indigenous Australians will be reversed, quality of life the norm, a permanently equitable 'place' will exist within the systems and society of this country, and *Indigenous justice matters* is a phrase not an aim. Until then we all have a vital role, however possible, to play.

On behalf of the NATSIEC Commissioners and myself, I give heartfelt thanks for your support throughout this year in accompanying NATSIEC on this journey of hope, spirituality, healing, justice, renewal and restoration. May God bless you and your dear ones during the holiday season and may we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ with much gratitude, love, joy and peace.

Kerry Charlton

Are we pathways or walls? Different ways of seeing and doing

The Centre for Ecumenical Studies recently held a five day summer school titled "Looking Beyond Division" in Brisbane. Queensland Churches Together Indigenous Peoples Partnerships, NATSIEC and Murri Ministry presented an interactive session which invited course participants to reflect on different ways of seeing and doing.

Visuals provided the stimulus to consider their walls or pathways in the Indigenous justice journey and show that by seeing differently walls become pathways.



Centre for Ecumenical Studies
Summer School Participants

Issues discussed included the Northern Territory Intervention, Indigenous Youth, Incarceration rates and Deaths In Custody.



Transforming the Bricks



Artwork by Lafe Charlton of air bubbles made by creatures in a creek tested ways of seeing.

Presenters: Georgia Corowa,
Kerry Charlton, Ravina Waldren

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The Ministry of Reconciliation has two justice advocacy and action prongs. One can't be done authentically without the other. The first involves the process of heart change, a transforming of spirit, mind, attitude and actions. The second is the radical act of power shifts within structures and processes. Such social reform, embedded structurally into the political, economic, legal and social blueprint of this country's systems, recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as partners, colleagues, leaders and contributors to success.

Social inclusion, cohesion and justice can only occur for Australia's First Nations people when the rightful place and processes are effectively created within Government and non-Government systems.

Reconciliation Australia, through their Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) are transforming the heart conversion work into actions of organizational change, inclusive practices and support structures, all of which are vital stepping stones for ensuring the rightful place is achieved.

Check out the Reconciliation Australia site for current information.

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au>

"Lateral violence" in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is on the table.

There are concerning levels of multi-layered violence within and across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities with statistics that reflect it.

Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner related that he gave considerable thought to raising this issue, known also as lateral violence, due to the risks of prompting adverse reactions and reinforcing existing negative stereotypes. His latest Social Justice and Native Title Reports recently tabled in Parliament describes that lateral violence includes bullying and malicious gossip. Mr Gooda relates that Government expectations and process can contribute to lateral violence and how the Native Title process has amplified this issue. He emphasized that it will take much courage, goodwill and determination to address this serious topic and he is beginning the conversation.

<http://www.Koorimail.com/>

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/index.html

Constitutional Recognition

A reminder that the Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples consultations have closed and the next step of formulating the feedback is happening. Check for updates at the website www.youmeunity.org.au

The NCCA member churches and NATSIEC supporters have been actively engaging in the Constitutional submission process. Readers can check out papers submitted by [The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia](#) and by the [NATSIEC Chairperson Bishop Saibo Mabo](#).

Enough is enough - Urgent action needed to end Aboriginal deaths in custody

Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is again a matter of deep concern across the States despite the 1991 Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody's mandate. <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/>

Twenty years on and almost 400 Indigenous people have died in custody, soaring imprisonment rates show Indigenous adults are 14 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous adults and Indigenous young people are 28 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people. Female incarceration rates have also increased. www.cjpcbrisbane.wordpress.com/

Overcrowding, recidivism, incarceration rates, introduction of the Justice Reinvestment models and the establishment of new national Deaths in Custody monitoring groups are among issues being highlighted by campaigning groups.

The suffering for the victim's families is exacerbated as efforts for justice clash with official findings. Families are left grappling with significant and traumatic loss of their loved ones, real people, who have died in shocking circumstances.

Groups around the country are calling for support from community, churches, and government to proactively work together to change prevailing conditions leading to deaths in custody. The newly formed *DIC Working Group Far North Queensland* is seeking support to hold a local grassroots forum. The DIC Watch Committee WA have published latest research findings. The Sydney ACM recently held a forum on *prisons, the justice system and Aboriginal peoples*. To find out how you can support these efforts see below sites or contact NATSIEC: www.cjpcbrisbane.wordpress.com/
www.acmsydney.wordpress.com
<http://deathsincustody.org.au/prisonovercrowding>

The Doing Time - Time for Doing report, prepared by the House of Representative Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, identifies the failures and the dismal reality. The report's forty recommendations have now been accepted by the Federal Government. <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/sentencing/report/fullreport.pdf>

From the news wire...

Did you know that NATSIEC blogs? You can go there for more regular updates. [NATSIEC Blog](#)

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation Ltd. a national, Indigenous-controlled, not for profit organization was established to support community-based healing initiatives which address the traumatic legacy of colonization, forced removals and other past government policies.

The issue of *Healing* for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is founded in the effects of their contact with dispossession, colonization and government *Protectionism* and awareness of how it has impacted them.

Dr Robert Brooks of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation explains what trauma is and the depth to which it can affect one's life and wellbeing and links to chronic illnesses and associated conditions.

The health effects of trauma, *'Trauma' is the consequence of individuals, families or communities experiencing fearful events. How people show their trauma varies according to the: event itself; age; gender; relationship to the person; and whether it is a single overwhelming event or a series of events.*

The immediate physical effects are often minor or healed relatively quickly; the longer-term effects may not even be linked to the past events by the person or workers. A traumatic event can affect wellbeing including a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Trauma may also impact lifestyle choices including alcohol, diet, smoking and physical activity. The psychological impacts of trauma combined with these lifestyle choices increase the chances of diabetes, renal disease, hypertension, asthma, heart disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, and many other illnesses.

The more traumatic experiences in a person's life, the greater the impact on their lives. For example, children who experience a number of adverse events, very typical in abused children, are nearly 4 times more likely to experience heart disease than those who have not experienced trauma. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience substantial historical, collective and individual trauma including loss of community, culture and purpose. They have substantial chronic health issues with all the chronic diseases they experience known to have a substantial trauma component. Those working with vulnerable people need to be aware of the important research emerging in the area of trauma and its diverse effects and reflect on its impact in their work. (Dr Robert Brooks, Research Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation.)

Following the then Prime Minister Rudd's Apology to Indigenous Australians in 2008, funding was set aside for the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation. A wide consultation process held across the country brought forward a collation of the participants' experiences, opinions, wishes, visions and dreams all of which guides the Foundation's work.

For more information about the Healing Foundation, current projects and grant rounds click onto <http://healingfoundation.org.au/>

Disclaimer

NATSIEC provides this newsletter to share information about issues which affect and concern Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The views contained in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views or position of either NATSIEC or the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Martung Upah Appeal



If you enjoy this newsletter please consider making a donation.

NATSIEC receives significant funding from **Act for Peace** and the **Uniting Church (NSW) 2% fund**, however the rest of our funding comes from donations by Churches and Individuals to its annual appeal Martung Upah*.

By supporting the Martung Upah appeal you are joining us in a partnership to engage Churches and the wider community in fostering a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Together we can work towards

healing the hurts of the past and building a better tomorrow for all our children so that injustice and discrimination will not be part of Australia's future.

We thank you for your support.

To download go to the Martung Upah Appeal webpage [click here](#).
To go direct to the online donation page [click here](#)

* Martung Upah is from Western Australia and means partnership.

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