

Act for Peace

Report to the National Council of Churches in Australia

10th National Forum



Our Vision: A peaceful world where all people share a safe, just and dignified life.

Our Mission: The NCCA, responding to the Word and Spirit of Jesus Christ, through Act for Peace seek to enable people to work together to achieve safety, justice and dignity in communities threatened by conflict and disaster.

Act for Peace continues to pursue our vision and mission, enabling people to work together to achieve safety, justice and dignity in communities threatened by conflict and disaster.

In the three years since the last Forum, Act for Peace has strengthened our governance structure, revitalised the vision of Frank Byatt – founder of the Christmas Bowl, and continued to provide services to our partners which enable them to take the lead in the regeneration of their own nations.

¹ Ayesha (name changed to protect her safety), a Rohingya refugee in Jamtoli Refugee Camp, Bangladesh, March 2018. Act for Peace works with Christian Aid to provide vital services including medical care, basic food, and protection to 50,000 refugees in Jamtoli, one of many camps offering security to around 1 million Rohingya refugees.



Tragically, in 2019 our planet is home to the largest number of displaced persons ever recorded, due to both conflict and disaster. The rise in nationalism, fundamentalism, scepticism of institutions including religious institutions, and the cost of living present pressures which must be addressed by global, national and local leaders with government, the church and beyond.

Act for Peace believes that, more than ever, our role as an ecumenical faith based organisation is vital in raising the voice of the voiceless, enabling love for our neighbour, and seeking justice.

Key highlights of our journey over the recent three years are noted below. We look forward to providing program highlights in a short presentation at the Forum. Our recent Annual Report has also been uploaded for your convenience.

Governance

- **Legal Transfer**

As agreed by the NCCA Board, Act for Peace became a legal sub-entity of the National Council of Churches in Australia in 2017. This transition provides appropriate risk management for the NCCA. Act for Peace is governed by a Board, replacing the former Commission. In 2017 and 18 Act for Peace's Board included Commissioners from our previous governing body. In 2019 the Board has been expanded to include three ongoing Directors and five new. Directors are appointed on the basis of skill, with the majority of Directors active in the life of NCCA member churches. Our current Directors are:

Chair: Rev John Gilmore (ongoing). John is also a Director of the NCCA.

Deputy Chair: Ginie Udy, Member of the Policy Committee and Safeguarding Lead

Treasurer: Paul Nichols, Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee

Elizabeth Stone (ongoing), Chair of our Policy Committee

Alison Preston (ongoing), Member of the Policy Committee

Marcus Sandmann, Member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee

Leigh Cleaves, Member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee

Jamie Davies, Professional Development Lead

- **Property**

In 2018 Act for Peace sold the property in Little Collins St, Melbourne. A new property has been purchased on St Kilda Rd, with the intention of the property being home to Act for Peace (Melbourne Staff), the NCCA (Melbourne Staff) and the Victorian Council of Churches.

- **Safeguarding:**

During the period increasing attention has been given across the international aid community and within Australian society to the safeguarding of children, and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Act for Peace was one of three NGO representatives on a national review into the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) within the Australian Aid sector.

Act for Peace has a zero tolerance approach to any form of exploitation, abuse or harassment. We have staff focal points for child safeguarding and PSEAH working both with staff and partners, and in 2019 we introduced a Safeguarding Lead position on our Board.

Partnerships and Programs

Act for Peace works to increase safety, justice and dignity for communities threatened by conflict and disaster through supporting local partners to provide effective programs, and by strengthening program outcomes through advocacy initiatives that aim to improve the policies and systems that can both liberate and oppress the communities we serve.

We are currently working with partners serving communities in or from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Jordan, Palestine, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vanuatu and Tonga.

Our partners include National Councils of Churches, ecumenical aid agencies or networks, and agencies or networks with specific skills or focus required for our work. Act for Peace also collaborates with other Australian and international non-government organisations (NGOs). In the main, we are working with partners for years, often decades, for the length of time that civil war rages and then until peace is restored, and where regular large scale natural disasters have become the norm.

Whilst the majority of our funding comes from churches and other members of the Australian public, Act for Peace also accesses funds from governments, and from other aid agencies partnering in our work.

Examples of some of the programs we support include:

- *Sri Lanka Refugee Return and Reintegration Program (SLRRRP)*; Co-designed with our partner, the Organisation for Eelam Refugee Rehabilitation (OfERR), this program enables Tamil refugees in India to prepare for return to Sri Lanka through raising awareness of the current Sri Lankan context and providing a framework to analyse readiness, then providing practical steps required for safe return, such as access to documentation, establishment of livelihoods, access to schools and medical care etc.



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In addition, Act for Peace supports OfERR to lead on dialogue with the governments of Sri Lanka and India and the UNHCR to establish policies for safe return of refugees. In Sri Lanka and India the SLRRRP is running in conjunction with a second like program – ‘I’m Prepared’, which also offers the same programmatic support to Burmese Karenni refugees on the Thai Burma Border. The two programs are linked by learning research conducted by the Institute for Sustainable Futures, Sydney University.

- Refugee focused programs in our region such as SLRRRP, ‘I’m Prepared’ and others are supported through advocacy carried out by the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network. As an active member of APRRN, Act for Peace is consulting with civil society groups and global forced migration research groups linked to the Global Refugee and Migration Compacts, influencing the focus and objectives of research currently undertaken.
- In 2018 Act for Peace scaled up our support for the *Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel* (EAPPI), with the aim of mobilising additional Australian human rights observers for the Palestinian West Bank. EAPPI brings together volunteers from around the world to spend three months living alongside communities under military occupation in Palestine and Israel. The volunteers, called Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs), provide a protective presence for families at risk of harassment; monitor human rights abuses; and, on return to their home countries, use their firsthand experience to advocate for international pressure on decision makers to comply with humanitarian law and to find long-term solutions to the conflict.



² Tamil refugee women receive assistance with accessing civil documentation vital for their return and reintegration into life in Sri Lanka. Many refugees flee from their homes at a time of crisis leaving behind documents such as birth and marriage certificates which are essential for access to services and for registering their children. OfERR assists refugees by providing access to legal services that replace lost documentation.

Act for Peace has also scaled up our community based protection work, ensuring local community approaches are integrated into strategies to prevent or reduce violence, force, deprivation or abuse for individuals or groups threatened by conflict, disaster or displacement. By working with local community to reduce threats and vulnerabilities and increase people's capacity to cope, we are seeing both better preparedness and response and increased leadership and authority, throughout communities.

Act for Peace tailors our community based protection approach to address the local context. Current examples include working with:

- The National Council of Churches in the Philippines to address human rights abuses
- The Tonga National Christian Council to both prepare for and respond to natural disaster

- The Zimbabwe Council of Churches to increase food security in the drought zone, and
- The Near Eastern Council of Churches Department of Services for Palestinian Refugees to increase safety for Palestinian's living in Gaza.



- **The ACT Alliance**

Act for Peace is a member of the international ACT Alliance, a coalition of 152 churches and church related organisations working together in over 125 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards.

In recognition of the current context, the ACT Alliance agreed a new strategic plan in October 2019, with a focus on the following:

1. Climate Justice
2. Gender Justice
3. Peace and Human Security
4. Migration and Displacement
5. Emergency Preparedness and Humanitarian Response

Act for Peace's work is aligned with that of the Alliance, and we remain an active member. These key synergies will be reflected on in our own strategic review in 2020.

³ A family rebuilding their home after disaster hit, Tonga.



Act for Peace currently coordinates the Pacific Australia New Zealand Forum (PANZ), our local regional Forum through the Alliance. Rev. Dr Bob Mitchell, CEO of Anglican Overseas Aid represents PANZ on the Act Alliance Board.

Further information on the ACT Alliance can be found at: <https://actalliance.org/about/>

- **The Church Agencies Network (CAN)**

Act for Peace remains an active member of the CAN, a network of 11 denominationally based international aid agencies including Anglican Overseas Aid, Anglican Board of Mission, ADRA, Uniting World, Caritas, Global Mission Partners, Australian Lutheran World Service, Baptist World Aid, Quaker Services Australia, the Salvation Army.

Our purpose is to collaborate across a range of our work within Australia and overseas in order to be more effective actors in the aid and development sector, and have a more influential values-driven voice in relevant policy matter, attitudes and awareness within Australia through:

- a. Organisational development, CEO and staff networking;
- b. Programs collaboration to ensure effective support for partners; and
- c. Projecting a CAN voice.

During the period eight CAN members, including Act for Peace formed CAN DO – the Church Agency Network Disaster Operations consortia. Our vision is “Churches collaborating to enhance community resilience to disaster and conflict”. Through CAN DO, members work in collaboration to strengthen preparedness for disasters with our Pacific partners, and to respond to disasters globally. CAN DO holds an Australian Government contract, and through this contract collaborates with other Australia Aid Agencies. Through FY19 CAN DO has most specifically focused on working with partners in Fiji and Vanuatu, and supporting the cyclone response in Indonesia.

Act for Peace is currently a member of the Steering Committee for CAN DO.

For further information about CAN please see our website:

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

Marketing and Communication

Communicating with our supporters is integral to our vision of enabling people to work together to achieve safety, justice and dignity in communities threatened by conflict and disaster. A key focus for us is to ensure the individuals and congregations supporting our work are provided with quality initiatives which enable them to fulfil their personal vision for fulfilling the gospel call to love thy neighbour, and to seek justice for those who are oppressed.

Act for Peace continues to engage with individuals and churches across denominations through a range of actions including worship resources, events, campaigns, and opportunities to provide financially.

In 2018 our *Christmas Bowl* program re-engaged with the vision of the founder, the Reverend Frank Byatt, who, in 1949, laid a bowl on his Christmas table and invited his guests to contribute what they thought the value of the meal would be, and to pause to think of those in greater need than themselves. Reverend Byatt remained a dedicated advocate for those around the world suffering from sickness, disease and poverty, urging parishioners to give selflessly. The *Christmas Bowl* carries Reverend Byatt's message to congregations around Australia, and remains the cornerstone of our work with churches.

In recent years Act for Peace launched the *Ration Challenge*, an event designed to raise awareness of the life of a refugee, including the conditions they face day to day. Each year in Refugee Week thousands of Australians sign up to live off the rations of a Syrian refugee living in Jordan.

In doing so they receive information to share with family and friends, and are tasked with raising sponsorship funds.



Through the *Ration Challenge* Act for Peace creates links with younger Australians, in particular those with a strong heart for justice seeking opportunities to give and to learn and in that way to change our world. In 2018 we introduced a special *Ration Challenge* program for schools and raised funds in New Zealand, and in 2019 we added fundraising for the first time in the UK and the USA.

The Link magazine is now available online as an information source about current programming, and the key issues Act for Peace is addressing globally.

Our *Gifts for Peace* catalogue has grown in popularity, providing opportunities for supporters to purchase gifts for those who don't need 'things', contributing to international programs.

Supporters continue to give generously when disasters hit through our *Emergency Appeals* program, and through our regular giving programs such as *PeaceMail*.

Act for Peace's income has continued to rise over the past three years, however we are very cognisant of the challenges of raising funds in the current environment, and predict a levelling out of

⁴ Syrian refugees in Jordan work together with our partner, the Near Eastern Council of Churches Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees in organising food distribution.

income over the coming years. We are very aware that the increasing number of charities in Australia, coupled with the increasing cost of living, provides specific challenges for some of our generous supporters.

Over the last two years we have upgraded our capacity to create a specific 'journey' for each supporter, sharing with them information most closely tailored to their interests.

In 2018 we asked our supporters to identify what they valued most about our partnership, and what they believed were the most important issues for us to respond to. This information will be taken forward into our strategic planning process in 2019. We have also invested in developing new ways for supporters to engage, including crowdfunding and in FY20 will revisit our campaign strategy, engaging supporters in actions which influence policy.

We welcome feedback from the supporters who join with us to achieve our Mission.

With partners, our supporters are an integral to our network of people working together, across denominations, to achieve safety, justice and dignity for communities threatened by conflict and disaster.

We would like to acknowledge Commissioners and Board members who retired from service since the last Forum, Sister Elizabeth Delaney, Chey Mattner and Heather Saville. In June 2017 Alistair Gee resigned as our Executive Director, and after a period as Acting Executive Director Janet Cousens was appointed as our CEO.

In addition to thanking our supporters and partners, we extend our thanks to our Board, and to our staff, who work each day to see the fulfilment of our Mission.

