



ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS ON AFGHANISTAN

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS ON AFGHANISTAN

1. The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia has unequivocally declared that the church receives the gift of peace from Jesus Christ, and is therefore called to a ministry of peacemaking.

2. The increasing deaths of Australian soldiers in Afghanistan and their funerals in Australia are a stark reminder of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, of the many deaths of combatants and civilians, and the grief of those whose loved ones have died in the long conflict there. Christians share the distress of the Australian community at the continuing deaths and share the grief of those who are bereaved by them.

3. Living from the Christian hope for reconciliation of the nations, the UCA Assembly seeks a shared role with ecumenical partners in encouraging and exploring practical and necessary actions for resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. Church bodies in Australia have been largely silent on this particular conflict. It is now to work together with ecumenical partners to assist and support action toward peace in Afghanistan, including support of other Australian voices and organizations as they raise questions about the form of the Australian presence in Afghanistan. Ecumenical agencies, such as 'Act for Peace', provide positive examples of ecumenical partners seeking to foster a peaceful future in Afghanistan.

4. Recalling the ASC resolution of August 2009 regarding Australian involvement in Afghanistan the Assembly is encouraged to say unequivocally that we seek urgent political decisions toward a non-military resolution of the Afghani conflict.

09.47.01 It was resolved to:

a) note that the Assembly has acknowledged that God came in the crucified and risen Christ to make peace, and that same God calls the church, as a peacemaking body, to save life, to heal and to love their neighbours, working for true justice and security by non-violent means: (Uniting for Peace (03.19.02), Resolution 88.62; Assembly Minute 82.57); and

b) (i) encourage the Australian Government to increase such humanitarian and diplomatic means as will assist the people of Afghanistan to build a peaceful and just society; and

(ii) support the Australian government's policy to withdraw Australian troops at the earliest possible opportunity.

5. An increasing number of commentators and analysts (as varied as Richard Tanter and Greg Sheridan) now argue for an immediate withdrawal of the Australian military from Afghanistan. The ASC may be guided by this commentary, but must make its own call for the urgent and speedy withdrawal of Australian troops by the end of 2011. The church is not in a position to offer detailed policy on this matter. However, support for the intent of Australian policies which are designed to foster nation-building in Afghanistan is consistent with previous Assembly decisions. Securing a peaceful future there requires a complex response. To that end, a military withdrawal must also be accompanied by sustained and long-term humanitarian action.

6. Even though there will probably be suspicion in Afghanistan of such Australian actions the decade of Australian military presence now requires an equally committed non-military response by Australia.

7. Australian government engagement in international forums, supporting the UN and other international bodies, as they provide support for the reconstruction and nation-building of Afghanistan is both appropriate and helpful. The expenditure of a sum commensurate with the military expenditure by Australia has been suggested as an appropriate level of long-term humanitarian and non-military assistance.

PROPOSALS

The ASC resolve to

1. express the Uniting Church's continuing grief at the continued loss of life in Afghanistan, for those killed and for those bereft of their loved ones;

2. urge the Australian Government to expedite withdrawal of Australian troops by the end of 2011;

3. encourage the Australian government to

(a) convert the cost of the Australian military presence in Afghanistan into humanitarian support for Afghanistan;

(b) increase Australian diplomatic negotiation with the International community to assist in the future rebuilding of Afghanistan wherever possible; and

4. request the General Secretary to write seeking the support of the NCCA and other churches for these decisions.