



July 2006

REPORT TO THE ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 UnitingJustice Australia: for a world reconciled

After the launch of the Agency's new name at the Tenth Assembly, the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) approved a revision of the UnitingJustice Australia (UJA) mission and mandate in order to more accurately reflect the focus of the Agency's work. Although UJA subsequently lost its Agency designation, having been incorporated within a new Assembly team, Uniting Faith and Justice (UF&J), this mission statement continues to drive its work:

to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ by pursuing social and ecological justice and peace in Australia and the world.

This mission is inherently evangelical – it is an expression of the calling to share the good news of Jesus for the poor and the oppressed – and while it is part of the mission of the whole church, UJA has a particular responsibility for this area of service within the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. Its tasks include the following:

- pursue effective strategies for the realisation of justice
- identify critical issues of national and international significance and develop a considered position on these
- participate in public debate and advocate on national policy issues
- educate, inform and resource the church, to engage in actions for social and ecological justice and peace
- act on issues of injustice within the Church
- provide advice to Assembly, ASC, the President and the General Secretary on justice issues of national and international significance.

Priorities are set and identified through resolutions of the Assembly and the Assembly Standing Committee, long-term strategic planning, the

Reference Committee, issues arising out of ecumenical co-operation, and urgent political and social issues.

UJA is committed to ensuring that its work will:

- be grounded in the gospel
- build upon the tradition of the Uniting Church in Australia
- be done in co-operation with synods and other Assembly agencies
- be done ecumenically and in partnership with other organisations
- be conducted on the basis of the best research available
- enhance human rights
- be concerned with the needs of the whole creation
- be grounded in relationships of solidarity with those most affected by injustice
- reflect the life-experience of those who have experienced injustice.

1.2 UJA and the Tenth Assembly Key Directions

The Tenth Assembly Key Directions (KDs) were the policy priorities set to direct the work and programs of the Assembly in the triennium. It is the responsibility of UJA to report on how it has given life to those strategic directions. However, the form of the Key Directions makes it difficult for UJA to report on each systematically and in turn. Three of the eight specific KDs reflect major aspects of the mission and mandate of UJA. "Creating, building and nurturing 'gospel community'" through our "commitment to justice, reconciliation and peace" (KD ii), the emphasis of the Church's prophetic voice on national issues and the aim to help local congregations and groups engage with these issues (KD iii) and the focus on advocacy and critical engagement with our society (KD vi) are all integral to the work of UJA.



Our commitment to work for justice, reconciliation and peace is at the heart of all that we do and is expressed through our advocacy and our constant critique of society. Through our participation in public debate and our activities for the promotion of justice and peace, including supporting the President and General Secretary, UJA is an example of the Church's prophetic voice in action.

As part of the Key Directions Statement, the Tenth Assembly charged itself, its agencies and committees 'to explore and model theologically disciplined and collaborative ways of working'. In conjunction with the development of its new mission and mandate after the Tenth Assembly, UJA developed a series of principles to guide its work. These principles, listed above, included commitments to working ecumenically and in collaboration with synods and other Assembly agencies.

The Assembly's 2004 election resource is one such project. This report will detail many projects developed in collaboration with UCA synods and agencies. Uniting Church justice staff, both within the Assembly and across the synods, have worked together to improve our systems and processes of communication and collaboration on issues of national significance. We have developed ways of working together which include synod representation on task groups and the development of 'lead agency' models. The work of UJA would not be possible without the very generous level of support from synod justice staff, agencies and units.

The UJA principles also include commitments to ground the work in the gospel and build on the tradition of the Uniting Church in Australia. These commitments reflect the importance of rigorous theological reflection in justice work and advocacy. UJA is aided by its network of Uniting Church scholars around the country, who provide their theological knowledge and expertise to UJA projects and programs.

UJA's commitment to collaboration also finds expression in its contribution to the life and work of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)

and through a growing relationship with the World Council of Churches (WCC), particularly with the work of the International Affairs, Peace and Human Security Program and the Diakonia and Solidarity Program. In addition, we have developed good working relationships with community organisations including Amnesty International Australia and the Australian Conservation Foundation, and university centres including the University of New South Wales' Centre for Refugee Research and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney.

The following report on program activities details how the Tenth Assembly's priorities for the triennium have been taken up by UJA. It does not describe all our activities but covers work across all major program areas.

2. UJA PROGRAMS

UnitingJustice is committed to using the most appropriate strategies to make a positive difference in the world. Work on major issues may make use of a range of strategies:

- the drafting of statements for the consideration of the Assembly or Assembly Standing Committee;
- direct lobbying of Government and parliamentarians (meetings and letters);
- submissions to parliamentary and federal departmental enquiries;
- media statements;
- the production of resources for church members, including position and discussion papers, pamphlets, booklets and kits, and web-based resources such as information and action sheets;
- speeches and workshops at rallies, seminars and conferences;
- collaborative work through ecumenical alliances and partnerships with community sector organisations.

2.1 Reconciling Humanity

UJA's work is grounded in the hope that Christians have for the reconciliation of all creation with God, the belief that all people are created in the image of God and Jesus' call to us to work for a world of peace. We work for an end to violence and division and seek a world where all people are valued and can live with dignity, free from fear, persecution, marginalisation and violence.

2.1.1 Refugees and Asylum Seekers

This has continued to be a major area of work for UJA.

In September 2003 the National Director attended a series of meetings of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva. She represented the Uniting Church on the Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA), an alliance of church and community organisations, which attends these meetings every year to advocate on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers and to tell our Australian story in an international context. Government and non-government representatives from all over the world attended special briefing and workshop sessions held by ARRA where they heard about the devastating impacts of Australia's harsh policies on refugees and asylum seekers.

The Tenth Assembly resolution on Iranian Asylum Seekers (03.10.01) condemned the Government's plan to forcibly deport Iranian asylum seekers, and requested actions for advocacy and solidarity from the President and members of the Assembly. The President wrote many letters to the Minister for Immigration on behalf of individual Iranians who had converted to Christianity and were baptised by Uniting Church chaplains while held in immigration detention centres.

UJA funded Rosemary Hudson Miller to travel to South Australia to identify those asylum seekers in detention most at risk and determine how the Uniting Church could best provide support and care. The 'Baxter Project' was a major UJA initiative supported by the Synod of Western Australia (especially through the work of Rosemary Hudson Miller and Bev Fabb). The aim was to provide legal

assistance to asylum seekers in detention who had no legal advice and were at risk of being deported to unsafe countries. The project was funded with the money remaining from that raised by the Assembly to fund the chaplaincy at the (now closed) Curtin Detention Centre. The funds were being held in trust by the Synod of Western Australia. The Uniting Church is grateful to Libby Hogarth and her legal team for the enormous number of hours they contributed to this project and to the Australian Refugee Association (ARA) in Adelaide for their support. The President and National Director met with Minister Vanstone twice about the situation faced by this group as well as other refugee related issues.

As a result of these initiatives, we are thankful that almost all have been granted protection. Only two out of more than 40 Iranian members of the Uniting Church were deported. A service of thanksgiving was held at Pilgrim Uniting Church in Adelaide on 2 October 2005 where many of the Iranian refugees were present.

UJA initiated a research project with Amnesty International Australia and the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) to examine why the Australian government, with its current strong commitment to take refugees most at need from African countries, was not accepting refugees with disabilities and AIDS. The results of the preliminary research were included in our submissions to the 2004-5 Humanitarian program consultations and the Senate Inquiry into the operation of the Migration Act. There are early indications that the Government may be willing to change its practices to accept such people.

In July 2005 the ASC passed a resolution (05.48) condemning the practice commonly referred to as 'refugee warehousing' and endorsing the International Campaign to End Refugee Warehousing. The term describes the practice and politics of isolating large populations of displaced persons in camps or segregated settlements for ten years or longer. Seven million refugees, of a worldwide population of about twelve million, are currently living in these stagnant and confined

situations where they are deprived of their basic rights and face little prospect for the future, sometimes for generations. The General Secretary wrote to the Minister for Immigration requesting that the Australian Government work to end warehousing, particularly through representations at the September 2005 UNHCR Executive Committee meeting. UJA produced a fact sheet for church members and works to support the NCCA in its advocacy for durable solutions to long-term refugee problems.

Also in 2005, UJA and Hotham Mission made a joint submission into the major *Senate Constitutional and Legal Committee Inquiry into the Administration and Operation of the Migration Act 1951*. On the strength of our submission we were invited to give evidence at the public hearings in Sydney. The Committee was particularly interested in our advocacy for a system of complementary protection to improve the processing of refugee and other protection claims, our work with Amnesty on refugees with disabilities, and the demands on church services being caused by the lack of work and health care rights associated with many classes of temporary and bridging visas.

UJA has been supporting the campaign to reform the processing of protection claims with a system of 'complementary protection'. As part of its commitment to UNHCR'S *Agenda for Protection* Australia has agreed to consider a system of complementary protection. Under Australia's present system all protection claims, whether they are refugee claims or claims for protection triggered by our commitments to other international conventions and treaties, for example, the *Convention Against Torture*, are initially assessed only against the *Refugee Convention*. This is one of reasons why the system is unwieldy and unnecessary complicated and lengthy for so many asylum seekers. The NCCA, Amnesty International Australia and the Refugee Council of Australia have developed a proposal for how such a system would work in Australia. UJA has been a keen advocate for the system in our meetings with politicians and our

submissions to consultations and inquiries and we have produced an information resource for church members.

UJA has continued to make submissions to the annual DIMIA consultations on the Humanitarian Program. The 2005 submission was a collaborative project with the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) and included a special focus on the Women at Risk Program. A joint submission with Hotham Mission was made to the *Select Committee on Ministerial Discretion in Migration Matters* in August 2003 and the UJA National Director and Hotham Mission Project Manager were invited by the Committee to give evidence at a public hearing.

The National Director has delivered numerous presentations about refugee issues including major workshops for the 2004 NSW Social Justice Expo and the NSW Ecumenical Council. She was a speaker at the Tampa Anniversary Rally at Sydney Town Hall in August 2005 and for the third year in a row led the closing meditation at the Refugee (in previous years Women's Human Rights) Court of Testimonies at the University of New South Wales. UJA was a major sponsor and member of the organising committee for the national conference *Hopes Fulfilled or Dreams Shattered? From Resettlement to Settlement – Responding to the needs of new and emerging refugee communities*, University of New South Wales, 23-28 November 2005. The outcomes from this conference will be fed into the international human rights and refugee protection regime through UNHCR.

2.1.2 Uniting for Peace

The Tenth Assembly issued a major statement expressing our commitments to the Decade to Overcome Violence and to working for peace and genuine security. *Uniting for Peace* outlines the Uniting Church's belief that the 'ownership, use, or threatened use of nuclear, chemical and/or biological weapons is evil' and that 'genuine global security will only be achieved by working for an end to the trade in illegal weapons and the arms

trade, preventing the proliferation of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, and requiring progressive disarmament of all nations’.

Ahead of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York in May 2005 UJA produced an information resource on the state of nuclear weapons and wrote a letter to the Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, outlining our concerns about the fragility of the Treaty. The letter requested that the Australian delegation express our country’s unwavering commitment to Article VI of the Treaty, which calls for complete nuclear disarmament, and push hard for the implementation of the 13-point action plan of the 2000 Review Conference, which includes the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. We also called on Mr Downer to seek a resolution requiring all nuclear weapons-holding States to immediately lower the operational status of their weapons systems.

The National Director has given a number of speeches and workshops on issues of war and violence, including at a forum on the role of religion in an age of terrorism and war at NSW Parliament House in April 2004 organised by FAIR (Forum on Australia’s Islamic Relations), and a workshop on the violence which is caused by an uncritical drive for security at the 2005 ‘Women, Earth and Change’ conference on NSW north coast. This was also the subject of the Social Justice Sunday resource for 2004 and the topic of the March 2005 cover story of *Insights*, the magazine of the NSW Synod, written by UJA (including contributions from every synod). UJA has also continued its commitment to a broad coalition formed as the Australian chapter of the Global Action to Prevent War and to the Pacific Peace Building Institute, co-hosting a dinner for the Institute’s students from the Pacific at West Epping in November 2003.

2.1.3 Human rights

Much of UJA’s work is conducted around human rights issues, with reference to international human rights treaties negotiated through the United Nations. UJA seeks to live out the Church’s commitment to uphold human rights, made in the *Statement to the Nation* in 1977. Our response to

the Government’s policies on refugees and asylum seekers, for example, invokes Australia’s obligations under the international Refugee Convention and Protocol, as well as other international conventions and treaties. We are concerned that Australia’s long-held commitment to upholding human rights has been weakened by recent national policy in immigration and national security, and by the Government’s increasingly dismissive attitude both to the United Nations’ role in upholding human rights, and to Australia’s obligations under international human rights conventions and treaties.

In line with the UCA’s commitment to human rights we have made submissions to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee inquiries into the proposed *Australian Human Rights Commission Legislation Bill 2003* (April 2003) and the *Anti-Terrorism Bill 2005* (prepared on behalf of UnitingJustice by Justin Whelan, UnitingCare NSW. ACT, November 2005). The first of these Bills was intended to reduce the powers and resources of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and although the legislation was not passed it remains on the Government’s agenda. The second bill seeks to erode civil liberties, including freedom of movement and speech.

Resources produced include substantial materials for Human Rights Day (5 December every year), fact sheets on aspects of human rights generally, and in response to the Anti-Terrorism Legislation of 2005, letters to the Prime Minister, members of parliament and senators, media releases and a call to action for church members.

The National Director was invited by the Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition to be a key speaker at the Sydney rally to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the UN in September 2005.

2.2 Transforming Society

Work in this area is about critical engagement with the political and economic systems which order our societies, encouraging systems and structures that promote justice and equity and freedom. Jesus challenged the religious, economic and political systems and structures of his time which served

to exclude and marginalise people and taught that such systems needed to serve the needs of people, especially the poor and the most vulnerable, and not the other way around. Much of our work in this area focuses on structural injustice as we seek to follow the example of Jesus.

2.2.1 Industrial Relations

Throughout 2005 one of UJA's major campaign priorities was the Government's industrial relations reforms. UJA's work focused on the substantial negative impact that the changes will have on low paid workers and vulnerable members of society. This work, enabled by the support of synods (and we are especially thankful for the contributions of Ann Wansbrough, UnitingCare NSW.ACT and Mark Zirnsak and Anthony McMullen, Justice and International Mission (JIM), Synod of Victoria and Tasmania) gained substantial public attention and national news exposure in print and television, and both the National Director and the President participated in radio and television interviews.

As part of this work, UJA met with peak trade union and employer organisation representatives from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), and we were able to support FairWear's campaign to protect outworkers. Along with the President and representatives from JIM and UnitingCare NSW.ACT, we met with key Federal politicians including Minister Kevin Andrews, Barnaby Joyce and Stephen Fielding. We also conducted a strategic letter-writing campaign to key members of parliament and senators, asking that they reject the bill or press for formulated amendments which would preserve and enhance minimum standards of employment. We worked closely with the NCCA through the Social Justice Network and maintained frequent communication with the NCCA General Secretary, John Henderson.

UJA coordinated and produced a substantial submission to the Senate inquiry into the legislation and the President and Ann Wansbrough appeared before the hearing to present the Church's

opposition to the bills. In addition, UJA produced significant information and advocacy resources for congregations, including Fact Sheets and a call to action. We supported local initiatives such as a Canberra-based vigil against the laws outside of Parliament house. The National Director also attended and spoke at rallies and conferences about the Church's imperative to critique Government policy in this area.

2.2.2 Economics for People

UJA is committed to the development of economic systems and structures that serve the needs of all people, especially the poor. The rise of an unfettered global market economy has had devastating implications for many of the world's peoples. We have seen the rise of huge transnational corporations whose wealth outstrips that of the majority of countries and a drive to international and national monetary, financial and trade systems that increase the access of such companies and their shareholders to the world's wealth. The Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (2004) talks of our 'scandalous world' where 'the annual income of the richest 1% is equal to that of the poorest 57% and 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition'.

UJA's work in this area over the last triennium has not been as extensive as we had planned but we have been working in partnership with Uniting International Mission (UIM) and JIM on a number of issues.

With UIM we have worked to gain Assembly endorsement of the Micah Challenge campaign, an international ecumenical movement supporting the Millennium Development Goals which aim to halve global poverty by 2015. In December 2003 we jointly wrote to the Prime Minister requesting that the Government contribute financial support to *The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria*. These diseases are suffered by around 50 million people around the world and adversely affect individuals, their families, communities,

and entire nations. The Global Fund's purpose is to attract additional contributions and distribute these funds in order to increase resources available to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria and contribute to poverty reduction.

While we were pleased that the Australian Government pledged \$75 million to the Fund over four years to 2007, this is well below what we should be contributing based on our relative wealth.

In response to renewed concerns about the unethical marketing of breast-milk substitutes in poor and developing nations, and evidence of systemic violations of the World Health Organisation *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* (WHO Code) and World Health Assembly Resolutions (WHA Resolutions) in the international activities of companies who operate within Australia UJA, with JIM acting as the 'lead agency', prepared a statement of concern which was passed by the ASC in March 2004. The Assembly has called on all companies to fully comply with the WHO Code and subsequent WHA Resolutions relating to marketing of breast-milk substitutes (Resolution 04.17). Mark Zirnsak and the National Director have met with Nestle management and JIM, in its role as lead agency, continue to communicate with Nestle. JIM is also preparing advocacy materials and a special webpage for the UJA website.

The problems caused by international debt continue to cripple many poor and developing nations. In February 2005, after the Boxing Day tsunami, the President wrote to the Prime Minister to express our support and appreciation of the Australian Government's commitment to providing \$500 million over five years in grants, and a further \$500 million in concessional loans, to assist Indonesia under the *Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development*. However, we remained concerned that debt relief was not a part of this package. Based on the current levels of repayment, the cost to the Australian Government of debt relief would be small compared to the benefits it would bring to Indonesia and if

Australia took the lead, other key creditors may follow. Indonesia has a public external debt of over US\$80 billion and last year spent one quarter of the Government's domestic revenue on debt service payments. Total debt repayments due from Indonesia to foreign creditors were reported to be in the order of US\$7 billion for the 2004/2005 financial year.

On other issues of economic justice, the National Director delivered a workshop on theological and biblical approaches to poverty for UnitingCare Australia, and another on Christian justice in an economic age for United Theological College Seminar Week 2004. In November 2003, she appeared on ABC radio in an extended interview about the churches responses to the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement.

2.2.3 Christians and Politics

In 1977 the inaugural Assembly's *Statement to the Nation* committed the Uniting Church to engage in public life as it sought to live out the gospel in the world:

A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church. In the Uniting Church our response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs.

This statement, based in our deeply rooted understandings of the mission of God in the world and our call to discipleship, reflects a significant aspect of the Uniting Church ethos and identity. It is no accident, then, that the Uniting Church has a proud reputation in Australia for speaking out about issues of national and international significance.

With a renewed interest in the relationship between religion and politics over the last few years, UJA has provided a voice in the public forum speaking out for basic Christian values - for compassion, justice, generosity, forgiveness and reconciliation. We have sought to focus more attention on issues of injustice, discrimination, poverty, violence and greed rather than on issues of personal morality

(which are the ones normally associated with 'Christian values' in the media). We have maintained both the importance of the separation of church and state and the responsibility of all Christians to be active citizens participating and engaged with democratic processes.

In 2004 UnitingJustice managed the production of the Assembly's election briefing paper, *No Security Without Justice: your faith, your vote, your voice*.

The booklet and the web-based issues papers on which it was based, aimed to explore the implications of the gospel for national policy areas including reconciliation, multiculturalism, the environment, issues for rural and remote Australia, healthcare, education, welfare, issues of international aid and development, and international peace. It contained non-partisan material based on the Church's work and commitments, to help church members think about issues from a Christian perspective, listen to politicians and political parties with discernment and cast an informed vote. The question which lay at the heart of all the material was: what kind of society does God call us to build? *No Security Without Justice* was the result of collaboration and co-operation across the Synods and Assembly agencies. The booklet was reprinted twice, a total of 8500 copies being distributed to Uniting Church members and congregations around the country.

The National Director has delivered a number of speeches on the role of religion in politics for conferences and seminars including the Epping inter-church group (October 2003), Spirituality in the Pub (Kincumber July 2004) and a keynote address at the Race, Religion and Politics Conference which was an inter-faith pre-election conference organised by FAIR (October 2004). She was also invited to speak on this topic at a number of public forums throughout 2005 including ones hosted by the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney (February 2005), the Greens, the Democrats (the Don Chipp Foundation) and Christian Students Uniting at the University of New South Wales.

2.3 Cherishing Creation

Work in this area focuses on the natural world, the environment of our planet and our relationship with it. Here we seek justice, not just for future generations, but for the natural environment itself – the air, water, land and all the diversity of life on this planet. We seek to ensure that the integrity of God's creation is respected as good in itself, and not destroyed by human greed.

2.3.1 Climate change

UJA, supported by the JIM Environmental Project Worker, worked with the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) to produce a brochure for Christians on climate change for World Environment Day 2005. The project, initiated by ACF, was also supported by Catholic EarthCare and the NCCA.

In 2005 UJA committed to working with the World Council of Churches Office in the Pacific and our partner churches in the region on climate change. Together with the NCCA and JIM, UJA met with the Executive Secretary of the WCC Pacific office and representatives from other churches to explore the possibilities for joint work. This work is a long-term project which will be developed through 2006. It continues our commitment to Tuvalu expressed at the Tenth Assembly (Resolution 03.18.01) and our lobbying of the Australian Government to sign and ratify the Kyoto Protocols in relation to global warming. We have also been encouraging the Government to take a positive and proactive approach to the peoples of Tuvalu and other Pacific nations who will need to find new homes as the water swallows their land. We have also endorsed the *Citizens Guide to Climate Refugees* produced by Friends of the Earth.

2.3.2 Environmental justice

The UJA task group working on environmental issues is producing theological resources and other materials to resource the Assembly in the development of a major new statement on environmental issues for the Twelfth Assembly in 2009.

3. UJA LIFE

3.1 UnitingJustice within the Assembly

With a new mission and mandate and restructured Reference Committee approved by the Assembly Standing Committee in August 2003, and an increasingly vital network of support which included synod justice agencies and units and expert consultants in a variety of fields, UnitingJustice was looking forward to a period of consolidation to further develop the Agency's identity, its networks and ways of working. As it turned out, flexibility, rather than consolidation, was what was required.

At its September 2004 meeting ASC determined, contrary to the advice of the UJA Reference Committee, to remove the Agency designation from UJA and place it within a new Assembly team, Uniting Faith and Justice (UF&J). The National Director and Reference Committee spent a great deal of time and energy contributing to the consideration and planning around this restructure. While the long-term implications for the life and work of UJA are still unclear, we are encouraged by the early indications that UJA, through its contribution to the UF&J mission, will be able to progress work on some of the national justice priorities, for example peacemaking and bioethics, within a broader missional context and with better resourcing. We are grateful for the leadership of Glenda Blakefield, Associate General Secretary and UF&J Team Leader, in this aspect of UJA's work.

3.2 Ecumenical Collaboration

3.2.1 National Council of Churches

UnitingJustice is a keen supporter of the NCCA. The National Director serves on the Christian World Service (CWS) Commission and is the Chair of the CWS Refugee and Displaced Peoples' Program Committee. She is also a member of the NCCA Social Justice Network.

3.2.2 Social Justice Sunday

The Social Justice Sunday resource for 2003, *Subverting Racism*, was the second and last one managed by UJA for the combined team from the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting Churches. In 2004

the resource was taken over by the Social Justice Network of the NCCA and the National Director was seconded to the NCCA to manage the project. The resulting resource, *Security at all Costs? A Christian reflection on where to draw the line*, was a contribution to the Decade to Overcome Violence and examined some of the ways in which we as a nation and as individuals, churches and communities seek security and as a result, often unwittingly perpetrate or perpetuate violence on others and our world. The National Director maintained significant involvement in 2005 as the editor of the booklet *After the Tsunami: Building justice and peace*.

3.2.3 World Council of Churches

The National Director has attended two meetings associated with aspects of the work of the WCC. In September 2003 she met with a number of WCC staff in Geneva and attended the annual meeting of the Global Ecumenical Network on Uprooted People. As an outcome of the meetings in Geneva, she was invited to attend the second International Affairs and Advocacy Week in New York in November 2004. The meeting was convened by the International Affairs, Peace and Security team of the World Council of Churches. This staff teams includes the United Nations (UN) Liaison Office and is supported by the Churches Commission on International Affairs (CCIA), a group of thirty people nominated by churches and regional ecumenical organisations to advise the WCC on international affairs issues. The meeting was attended by over 50 representatives of church agencies and ecumenical organisations from around the world.

The first WCC representative to the UN in New York, Rev. Dr Laurence Bropleh, was appointed in September 2003. One of the aims of the meeting was to lift the profile of the WCC at the UN in New York. The other major objective was to build a network of people who can engage with each other and the WCC staff to share information, and help strategise and prioritise the work at the UN. The key themes of the meeting were economic justice, UN reform and conflict and militarism and three key areas emerged as common concerns across national

and denominational boundaries: the role of religion in politics and international affairs, especially widespread concern about the growing political and financial power of Christian fundamentalism; American imperialism and the capacity of nation states to resist US pressure, and impunity (that is, the escape from accountability of the perpetrators of human right violations).

Australia's presence at the meeting was appreciated (the National Director was the only Australian church representative) as Australian churches (with some notable exceptions) are often absent at this level of advocacy in international affairs.

The meeting highlighted the importance of church involvement, both denominationally and ecumenically, in international affairs at the UN level. Through our membership of the WCC the Uniting Church has accreditation as an NGO for participation in a number of UN meetings. As the Church continues to engage with issues of international as well as national significance, it is worth remembering that we do have this accreditation which amounts to a seat at some significant international forums and that we should consider a greater level involvement.

At the time of writing the National Director is preparing to attend the WCC Ninth Assembly as a UCA delegate. The WCC Director of Programme has invited her to serve as Rapporteur for a series of workshops entitled 'Public Life, Religion and Politics: Ambiguities and Possibilities' as part of the Ecumenical Conversation program.

3.3 Staffing and Resourcing

Despite significant achievements during the life of the tenth triennium, staff have continued to struggle to meet the demands and the expectations placed on UJA. Difficult decisions about priorities continue to be made, often leaving significant work on hold and major issues unaddressed. For example, we have been unable to progress the work on two planned proposed statements for the Eleventh Assembly on environmental and economic justice, and the Agency's contribution to the public debate on the anti-terrorism legislation has been less than

we would have liked. It is clear that with 1.6 FTE staff (including the National Director), despite the support and contributions of synod justice agencies, the Reference Committee and UJA consultants, UnitingJustice, committed as it is to the highest standard of work possible, does not have the capacity to work on more than two major (including the production of a major resource) and two or three minor program activities in any one year.

After three years with UJA, Tanya Richmond, Research and Administration Officer, left to take up a position as researcher in the NSW Cabinet Office. Tanya's contribution to the life and work of UJA was exceptional and we are grateful for her administrative expertise, outstanding research and writing skills and her passionate commitment and involvement in all aspects of the work.

Alicia Pearce joined UJA in May 2005 as Research Officer working three days a week. Alicia has a research background in industrial relations and comes with excellent research, writing and communication skills. She has already made a significant contribution to the work of UJA.

3.4 Communication

UJA is committed to communicating with members of the church and speaking into the public forum about the work of the Church on issues of justice and peace. Our UnitingJustice-news subscription email list has over 200 members. We contribute a monthly update on our work in *Assembly Update*, and take whatever opportunity we can to communicate through stories in synod newspapers and magazines.

As well as the workshops and speeches related to particular issues and program activities, the National Director has had a number of opportunities to speak more generally about the Church's commitment to justice and peace. These opportunities have included the following:

- workshop series on justice themes in Luke, Preaching and Teaching in the Year of Luke Conference, November 2003
- guest speaker at MLC School, Burwood, NSW, Speech Night 2003

- speaker, Heading Deeper series, Kippax Uniting Church, Canberra, May 2004
- keynote speaker, Daring Conference, Sydney 2004
- lead the Easter Mission at Westminster School, Adelaide 2005
- guest speaker, Santa Sabina College, Sydney, annual social justice day 2005
- invited preacher at a number of UCA congregations including Newington College, East Killara, Leura, Balmain, Pitt Street Sydney, Darwin Central and St Andrews South Turramurra.

At the time of writing UJA is working on a fresh look for its publications and a redesign of the website. Throughout 2006 and 2007 we will continue producing print and web-based resources to help Church members and groups in their consideration of justice issues and in their mission to live out gospel values in the world.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The UJA Reference Committee in consultation with the broader UJA network, on request from ASC for resources to aid in their consideration of a draft set of Key Directions for the Eleventh Assembly, identified some possible priorities for UJA over the next three years. The strategic directions that will determine UJA's priorities will be set by the Eleventh Assembly, but it may be helpful to the Assembly to offer here the network's thinking about what some of the key justice issues might be.

Some of the areas of work which we believe will continue to reflect significant issues in our current context include:

- peacemaking and overcoming violence
- human rights, economic justice (including industrial relations, trade, poverty)
- the environment (especially climate change) and
- bioethics.

UJA will also be keen to assess the state of Assembly positions on these key issues. They may reflect policy areas for which the Assembly either has no formal position or for which the existing position needs to be re-examined in the light of a changing world.

UJA will continue its commitment to work for social and ecological justice and peace. We will continue to seek change in national policy and public discourse, and to encourage the examination of core value systems. We continue engage in this prophetic mission believing that working for justice and peace is central to faithful discipleship. UJA seeks to serve God believing that Christianity which is true to the Bible, true to the person and being of Jesus Christ and true to the fullest experiences of our humanity must be a source of great hope in our society. It can remind us that we are capable of something better and that if we work together we can build a world where nature is respected and all humanity flourishes in dignity and hope.

Rev. Dr Murray Muirhead
Chairperson

Rev. Elenie Poulos
National Director

9 February 2006