

## Supporting human rights in Australia

Over the years, the Uniting Church has expressed concern that policies adopted by the Australian Government have failed to uphold human rights, for example,

- the prolonged, indefinite detention of asylum seekers, including children;
- anti-terrorism legislation which severely curtailed the right to a fair trial and freedom of speech and association;
- the WorkChoices legislation, which had far-reaching effects on the minimum basic working conditions of more than three-quarters of the workforce; and
- the Northern Territory Indigenous Intervention, which suspended the Racial Discrimination Act as it normally would have applied.

Australia is the only democratic, developed nation without legislative or constitutional protection for the basic rights and freedoms to which all people are entitled. Our law currently provides only an ad hoc and incomplete patchwork of rights protection.

The Uniting Church supports the development of a national human rights act. Such legislation would clearly set out the rights of all Australians and would serve as a checklist for government in formulating their policies and activities and for the courts when examining laws. Alone it is not the answer to all human rights problems but it has the potential to become an important part of our democratic system.



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CONSUMER

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## Take action

You can make a difference:

- use the Church's policy statements, especially *Dignity in Humanity*, to advocate for the rights of people who are vulnerable in Australia, for example, Indigenous Australians, those who are homeless, people with disabilities, prisoners and those who live in poverty
- learn about human rights and how they are and are not protected in Australia by visiting the human rights section of the UnitingJustice website
- help organise Sunday worship and special prayers to mark some of the international days that encourage awareness of human rights, for example, International Women's Day or Human Rights Day
- join a human rights advocacy organisation such as Amnesty International.



## About us

UnitingJustice Australia is the justice unit of the National Assembly. We pursue social and ecological justice and peace through advocacy and education and seek to communicate the Church's vision for a reconciled world. Visit our website to view and download issues-based fact sheets, worship resources, media releases, position papers and submissions to government.

Access all our resources and subscribe to our email news updates at our website: [www.unitingjustice.org.au](http://www.unitingjustice.org.au)

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dignity  
in humanity:  
recognising Christ  
in every person

...for a world reconciled

## A Christian commitment to human rights

Christian support for human rights rests on the understanding that community flourishes when all people are included and accorded the dignity and respect they deserve as beloved children of God. The recognition of human rights is an expression of Jesus' command to love our neighbour and our enemy and an affirmation of the dignity of all people. It is essential for achieving peace with justice.

As such, the Church condemns the abuse of human rights and the failure to uphold and promote human rights as contrary to the gospel of God's love in Christ for all human beings and the earth.

## Dignity in humanity

At its inaugural Assembly in 1977, the Uniting Church made a *Statement to the Nation*. In it, the Church made this commitment:

"We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights of each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race."

This pledge was remembered by the Uniting Church at its Eleventh Assembly in 2006, when it endorsed *Dignity in Humanity: Recognising Christ in Every Person*. In this statement, the Church expressed its commitment to the respect and protection of human rights and support for international human rights instruments.

The resolution committed the Church to ongoing assessment of Australian Government policy and practice against our international human rights commitments under United Nations treaties, and encouraged agencies and other groups within the Church to advocate for social policy consistent with these obligations.



## Ending the death penalty

A key principle described in *Dignity in Humanity* is the Uniting Church's declaration of its opposition to capital punishment, a position widely shared by churches and faith-based organisations around the world. The statement says:

"We declare... our opposition to capital punishment and commit ourselves to stand against the death penalty wherever it exists, regarding it as a cruel and inhuman punishment which denies the ability of an offender to reform."

## Human rights: indivisible, universal and inalienable

In *Dignity in Humanity* the Uniting Church expressed its belief that the human rights standards established by the United Nations are an expression of the birthright of every human being to all that is necessary for a decent life and a valuable framework for assessing political, economic and social systems in Australia and overseas.

The Uniting Church affirmed that under the international human rights system:

- civil and political rights cannot be separated from economic, social and cultural rights. No rights are possible without all that is necessary for a decent life, including adequate food, healthcare and housing, education, and the ability to participate in decision-making
- it is the duty of all states to promote and protect human rights and to eliminate all human rights violations and their causes
- it is the right and duty of the international community to hold all states and non-state actors accountable for violations of human rights
- no-one shall violate the rights of others in the exercise of their rights, and as such human rights must be limited only by what is necessary for the respect of the rights and freedoms of others.

We affirm the...  
right of all people to live  
free of persecution and  
violence, with access  
to all that is necessary  
for a decent life.

