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WORLD PERCEPTIONS OF RACISM IN AUSTRALIA

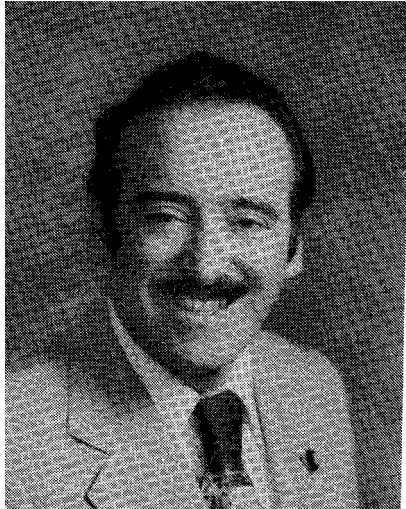
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A paper prepared by the Commissioner for Community Relations from Australian and overseas resources on how the world views Australia as a nation which accords equal opportunity to all people regardless of race, colour or ethnic origin.

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The Hon. A.J. Grassby

FOREWORD

Australians travelling overseas for long years past have been used to seeing the only references to Australia in newspapers across the world in the sporting pages. News of tennis, swimming and cricket successes were practically the only references they ever saw to Australia on their travels.

Today sporting references still predominate but more frequently than ever before there will be references to Australia's racial policies particularly as they affect Aboriginal people. Australia is finding itself increasingly the focus of world attention as the struggle for survival of a 40,000 year civilisation becomes more widely known.

This paper is a review of overseas perceptions of racism in Australia.

(The Hon) A J GRASSBY
Commissioner for Community Relations

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WORLD PERCEPTIONS OF RACISM IN AUSTRALIA

The extent of overseas knowledge of and interest in race relations in Australia is more than most Australians realise. Many who travel to other countries have been made uncomfortable by having to field questions on the subject from people whose information has come from a local broadcast or telecast, newspaper or journal article, or from the well-publicised visit to their country by an Aboriginal group.

The amount of information and concern are growing internationally and it would be foolish for us in Australia to ignore it and pretend that it does not exist. It is with the aim of increasing awareness within Australia of overseas perceptions of Australian race relations that this paper has been written.

1. UNITED NATIONS

The world community through the United Nations has always had the keenest concern with questions of race relations. As early as 1950 and 1951 experts were commissioned by the UN to examine the biological aspects of racial differences. They agreed unanimously that:

- (i) All men and women living today belong to the same species and descend from the same stock.
- (ii) There is no justification for believing that different cultural achievements denote differences in genetic potential.

In other words, problems of race relations are social in origin rather than biological. These findings were reaffirmed by an international meeting of the Committee of Experts held in Moscow in 1964 and again in Paris in September 1967 where the Committee also affirmed that:²

- (i) Social and economic causes of racial prejudices are particularly observed in

settler societies wherein are found great disparity of power and property.

- (ii) Racism tends to be cumulative. Discrimination deprives a group of equal treatment and presents that group as a problem. The group is then blamed for its own condition.

Consequent to the findings of the Committee of Experts the General Conference of the UN adopted a Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice on November 27, 1978. The Declaration is a statement of ethical and moral principles concerning the inherent wrongness of racial discrimination and which identifies areas where action can be taken to combat discrimination. It was intended to complement other UN documents, notably the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by the General Assembly in 1963, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which entered into force in 1969. This was ratified on September 30, 1975, by Australia, following enactment of Federal legislation, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, making ratification possible and declaring acts of racial discrimination illegal. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs stated that the Declaration's objectives:

"are in accord with the domestic and foreign policies of the Australian Government which is firmly committed to the eradication of racism and racial discrimination."³

The UN has been consistently concerned with human rights and the propagation of anti-discriminatory measures. These principles have been reiterated in a variety of forms, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which details specific rights to which all people are entitled without discrimination.

Statements of rights are yet more fully developed in the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified by Australia on December 10, 1975) and on Civil and Political Rights (ratified by Australia on August 13, 1980) where the theme of equality and non-discrimination is maintained.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 2(2)) requires that:

"State Parties shall, when the circumstances so warrant, take...special and concrete measures to ensure the adequate development and protection of certain racial groups or individuals belonging to them, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Similar provisions are included in the International Labour Organisation's Convention No. 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations which refers to special measures to promote the development of indigenous peoples and raise their standard of living.

The Australian Government, by its ratification of the UN Covenants mentioned, and by its public statements on the question of racial equality, subscribes to these ideals of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity for all sections of the community.

(a) Australia Reports to CERD

Under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 9) signatories undertake to submit periodic reports on measures they have taken to comply with the Convention. These Reports are considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The Australian Government submitted its first report in 1976 which was considered by CERD at meetings on April 6 and 12, 1977. Mr Paul Kapteyn, Dutch chairman of the Committee, described it as "comprehensive, detailed and candid", but went on to state that there was a "marked difference of opinion" as to whether Australia had carried out its obligations under the Convention concerning the dissemination of ideas based on racial prejudice.

The Committee also expressed the hope that the Australian Government would find ways and means of remedying the shortcomings of personnel and finance, of which the 4 Commissioner for Community Relations had complained. CERD also congratulated the Australian Government on establishing a Community Relations Council, whose function was to review governmental and national policies in relation to the prohibition of racial discrimination. In fact the Community Relations Council - whose establishment was stipulated in the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (s.28(i)) - had not at that time been established, nor indeed has it ever been established.

(b) UN Commission on Human Rights

The Working Group on Slavery of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifth session (1980) heard a statement by the London-based Minority Rights Group (MRG), a non-governmental organisation, entitled "Conditions of Aborigines in Australia". In the course of their comments the MRG stated that, "slavery-like practices against Aborigines still exist in remote pastoral stations in Australia". It went on to say that in Western Australia a Court of Disputed Returns found that discrimination against Aborigines had prevented them from voting, but the Western Australian Government introduced legislation almost immediately that legalised actions cited by the Court as being violations of Aboriginal rights.

The MRG also stated that in Queensland "the Government removed trachoma workers visiting Aboriginal communities because some people were concerned they were encouraging Aborigines to register for voting." A number of other Aboriginal inequalities and lacks in the human rights area were cited.⁵

(c) UN Economic and Social Council

On September 10, 1980, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, meeting in Geneva, heard a submission from Mr Jim Hagan (Chairman of the National Aboriginal Conference of Australia (N.A.C.), an affiliate to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples) and two other Aboriginal leaders. He referred to the extensive petroleum exploration program on the ancestral land of the Noonkanbah people in W.A. and the continuation of drilling, despite widespread protests throughout Australia at the desecration of sacred land.

The Aboriginal delegation asked the Sub-Commission to urge the Australian Government to take appropriate measures to protect the right of the Noonkanbah people to freedom of their religion by entitling them to control over their lands. They further requested that a study be undertaken of discrimination against Aborigines in Australia.

The immediate effect of the three-man Aboriginal delegation of which Mr Hagan was part has been described by a journalist⁶:

"The short-term impact by the Noonkanbah delegation was quite spectacular in terms of the publicity generated for their cause. Part of the reason for this was that American, Russian and French television and press not only packed the Sub-Commission and hearing but actively lobbied the Sub-Commission Chairman, Erik Nettel, of Austria, to have the Noonkanbah address brought forward on the Notice Paper."

The following day the delegation did a short television interview for the top current affairs program, "Time", and were also interviewed by the Ambassador of Norway to the UN, Knut Sverre, who is at the same time Special Adviser on Human Rights to Sweden, Iceland and Denmark, as well as to Norway.

The Secretary of the Program to Combat Racism (PCR) within the World Council of Churches, Prexy Nesbit, an American, said:

"The Noonkanbah address starkly revealed to the Sub-Commission the world-wide problem of the threat to indigenous people by multinational corporations."/

In the United States the Aboriginal protest against drilling at Noonkanbah received more media publicity than any other Australian issue, while the Aboriginal appeal to the UN attracted strong coverage on the electronic media networks. As a direct outcome of this initiative the Sub-Committee on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Apartheid and Decolonisation invited the NAC to attend preparatory meetings in Geneva in February 1981 in order to plan a major conference on indigenous people and land to be held in September 1981. NAC Executive Member, Mr Reginald Birch, addressed the gathering on the subject of Land Rights.

2. ABORIGINAL SUPPORT AGENCIES OVERSEAS

The internationalisation of Aboriginal Australians' struggle against discrimination has come about largely by the efforts of Aborigines themselves. In March 1979 Mr. Mick Miller, Aboriginal Chairman of the North Queensland Land Council, told 400 delegates to a Land Rights Teach-In at Sydney University:

"We have had to seek support from other nations because we are not getting it right here in Australia ... more and more communication between Aboriginal people in Australia and the international scene must be done." 8

A North Queensland Land Council delegation to Europe in November and December 1978 had visited England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. The members spoke at 93 meetings in six weeks. They spoke to Members of Parliament, Trade Unions, mining companies, anti-uranium groups, churches, shop stewards, the International Court of Jurists, the International Labour Organisation and a number of Embassies. In all these areas there was a considerable raising of consciousness about the Aboriginal situation and a growing desire to help in a practical way.

The opportunity came in the following year, 1980, as a result of a tour of Europe by Mr Bruce McGuiness, Chairman of the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, (NAIHO) and Mr. James Berg, Chairman of the Victorian Aboriginal Land Council.

They were able to establish an Aboriginal Information Centre in London headed by black British sociologist, Mr. Christopher Mullard (see also Section 5), the aim of which is to research issues affecting Aborigines and to launch a public relations campaign to inform the British of black Australians' aspirations and grievances. Finances for the Centre came from concerned groups in Europe and Australia.

In the Netherlands a Dutch translation of "The Mapoon Story" has been distributed which tells of the Aboriginal religious relationship with the land and their refusal to leave their ancestral home on the west coast of Cape York to make way for a bauxite mine. According to the Secretary of the Netherlands Commission for Justice and Peace, Dr B.A. Meulenbroek, interest in the Aborigines' case, "is increasing in the Netherlands. We are very happy about this and we will help wherever we can."

Support committees were set up in Denmark, Germany, Belgium, France, Austria and Switzerland. In California there was formed the Northern Hemisphere Association for the advancement of Australian Aborigines and reciprocal arrangements were made with North American Indian groups.

3. INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

The London-based Minority Rights Groups referred to above also published a booklet in 1978 entitled "Australia's Policy Towards Aborigines 1967-1977" 9 This is written partly by Dr H.C. Coombs and partly by Messrs Paul Coe, Kevin Gilbert, and Galarrwuy Yunipingu and Ms Marcia Langton. Reference is made to the ubiquity of discrimination against Aborigines, both historically and at the present time. The Office of the Commissioner for Community Relations set up under the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975 is seen by MRG as having

"shown energy in the formulation of educational programs, in mobilising public concern, and in exposing to police attention evidences of discrimination."

The Report goes on to say:

"Discrimination remains a fact of life for Aborigines and so far community attitudes do little effectively to discourage or counter it ... despite the proscribing of racial discrimination, Aborigines live with evidence of it day by day." 10

The booklet has had a world-wide distribution and has occasioned considerable comment.

Another organisation which has given support to Aboriginal causes has been CIMRA (Colonialism and Indigenous Minorities Research and Action), founded in London in 1976 and again with world-wide connections. CIMRA, together with War on Want, published in 1978 a book by Janine Roberts entitled "From Massacres to Mining : The Colonisation of Aboriginal Australia". This brought to the attention of numbers of people in the English-speaking world the incursions onto Aboriginal land made by mining companies.

One of the staunchest and most consistent overseas supporters of Aboriginal groups has been and is the World Council of Churches (WCC), which comprises 293 member churches throughout the world. In particular their Program to Combat Racism, (PCR), which was established in 1969 to provide information on the effects of racism and to make grants to racially oppressed minorities has shown its continued concern in practical fashion. An executive member of the PCR, Mr Jose Chipenda, visited Australia in June 1975 to meet Aboriginal groups in Central and Northern Australia to ascertain their needs. The visit was accompanied by a cheque for \$25,000 to assist in the Land Rights struggle. Two years later the Rev. Alexander Kirby, also on the executive of the PCR, condemned the Queensland Government as a "contributor to racism" and added that "the church was more part of the problem than an answer to it." 11

In September 1979, the World Council of Churches Executive Committee at a meeting in Helsinki approved further grants to three Aboriginal groups: the North Queensland Land Council, the Aboriginal Community Organisation Course in Melbourne, and the Kimberley Land Council in Western Australia, totalling approximately \$37,000. In a statement from Helsinki the WCC declared:

"Queensland is the only Australian State which continues to deny legislative recognition of the right of Aboriginal people to some part of their ancestral land and it continues to oppress its black population through the highly discriminatory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Act of 1971 ... The Federal Government has failed to intervene effectively ... against this discrimination and exploitation, which is increasing with the discovery of yet more significant mineral deposits."

By September 1980 WCC had granted \$80,000 to various groups of Aborigines. To qualify for a grant it was pointed out the group concerned had to be "struggling with the causes of racism" 12 and not just doing welfare work to ease its effects. 500 delegates from 80 nations at a conference of WCC held in Melbourne in May, 1980, resolved to send an international team to Australia in mid-1981 to investigate the situation of Aborigines and to call upon the International

Commission of Jurists to come to Australia to report on the denigration of the rule of law as far as Aborigines are concerned. The Conference stated that Aborigines

"have been robbed of their own land and spiritual heritage to an experience of racial and cultural genocide, and then denied any fair share in the fruits of the society constructed with their resources."

They expressed concern at "the continued oppression and suffering of the Aboriginal people".¹³ In a publication of the WCC dated June 1980¹⁴ an account was published of the report and recommendations from the Australian National Consultation of April 21-24, 1980. This Report, which has received widespread circulation throughout the world, invited the PCR to send a delegation to observe and assess the situation of Aborigines. In response to this recommendation and that of the May 1980 Melbourne conference, six high-ranking officials of the WCC will tour Aboriginal settlements throughout Australia in June and July 1981. Their findings will determine whether the WCC boycotts Australia's Bicentennial celebrations in 1988. The Information Officer of the Australian Council of Churches, Mr Russel Rollason, has stated that international church leaders would be taking their impressions of the conditions of Aborigines "to the four corners of the earth". The church leaders from Africa, America, Asia and Europe will visit Aboriginal communities in five States. Mr Rollason predicted that they would see "a fairly alarming situation".¹⁵

Later in that same year, 1980, the Vice-Moderator of the WCC Central Committee, Ms Jean Skuse, stated that "Queensland was rapidly gaining an international reputation for racism akin to that of Southern African countries."

WCC bought a share in AMAX Incorporated, thus joining the Anglican Church of Canada and two Roman Catholic orders in the USA (who also hold shares), in order to co-sponsor a shareholders resolution at the annual meeting of the US-based mining company. The resolution protested against the oil drilling by AMAX late in 1980 on Noonkanbah Station in North-West Australia without the consent of the Yungngora Aboriginal community, lease-holders of Noonkanbah, to whom the area is sacred.

This was the first time such international action had been taken by church groups over a conflict between a mining company and Aborigines.

Nor is it only from WCC that Aboriginal communities receive help. In September 1980 the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation wished to hold a conference for which subvention from the Australian Government was not forthcoming. NAIHO appealed to a Swiss-based group which provided funds, thus allowing the conference to go ahead as scheduled to discuss urgent health problems.

One of the ways that Aboriginal people have found to draw attention to their plight is through the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) which has won status as a non-government organisation of the UN. The National Aboriginal Conference is affiliated with WCIP, initiatives for the formation of which largely came from Indians of Canada and Sami (Lapps) of Scandinavia in the early 1970's. The first assembly was held in Port Alberni, Canada, in 1975, at which the Chairman of the NAC was the Australian delegate. With its affiliations from 26 countries, the holding of the Third General Assembly of WCIP in Canberra at the time of writing (April-May 1981) is a significant milestone in Aboriginal affairs. It provides a unique opportunity to meet other indigenous peoples and is the first time Aborigines have hosted an international conference on such a scale. The theme of the assembly is "Indigenous Freedom Now" and the focus is on human rights. A journalist commenting before the event stated that the conference would

"serve to draw world attention to the racism of Australian Governments and to those who allowed them to develop that way 7 we, the voters. "16

The conference is being attended by over 300 delegates and observers from about 30 different countries : approximately 180 from North, Central and South America, 60 from the Circumpolar region, and 40 from the South Pacific. There is to be a large involvement from Aborigines. Following the conference, international delegates plan to tour parts of Australia to meet with Aboriginal communities.

4. FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS

Though it is rare for another Government to criticise Australia in regard to an internal matter, this has occurred recently on the part of two Governments with particularly closeties to Australia, USA and New Zealand, over Aboriginal policy and practice.

At the British Commonwealth Conference in London in June 1977 the New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr Muldoon, in an altercation with Australia's Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, stated that:

"We treat our Maoris better than Australia treats its Aborigines. New Zealand is way ahead of Australia in race relations: New Zealanders would be ashamed if Maoris were treated in the same way as Australian Aborigines. "17

The Aboriginal situation was brought to the attention of the US Government in 1980 in a Report by the Department of State submitted to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the US House of Representatives and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the US Senate ¹⁸ and available as a public document.

The Report states that the Queensland Government administers

"certain laws relating to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in a way that has the effect of discriminating between the rights of white and black Australians."19

It comments that the Australian Government had abandoned its previous policy of assimilation as being unworkable and was now committed to the principle that Aborigines should be as free as other Australians to determine their own varied futures:

"The policy of the Queensland Government, however, continues to promote the concept of full integration of all indigenous people" .20

5. INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS MADE OVERSEAS

Articles and comments on the Aboriginal situation published in countries outside Australia have been too many to be quoted individually. A cross-section will suffice, particularly as they all seem to be admonitory in character.

In 1971 a French anthropologist, Alain Drouilleau, drew attention to the fact that white-style schooling had failed as far as Aboriginal children were concerned and that the sheep and cattle stations which some Aboriginal communities were endeavouring to run were not thriving because of the endless difficulties placed in their path. He also commented on an increase in alcoholism, delinquency and social disorientation which Aboriginal communities suffer. These ills he attributed to the fact that white societies had attained authority over Aboriginal areas and that the people themselves were aware that they were not in control of their own lives. For this control to be a reality he believed it would require a far greater economic base than Aborigines could at present command.²¹

At about the same time the Chairman of the Young Liberals in the United Kingdom, Peter Hain, after a visit to Australia, was calling for the formation in Britain of

"a broad-based Aborigine Solidarity Action Committee to publicise the issue of racism and to give practical support to Aboriginal groups in Australia."²²

He stated that treatment of Aborigines "must rank as an international scandal". He gave details of discrimination in the fields of housing, education and social status.

In the following year the well known American consumer advocate, Ralph Nader, was calling in his weekly newspaper column for an investigation into the plight of Aborigines. In his recent visit to Australia he had noted that tradition-oriented Aborigines did not have ownership of minerals on their reserves and lived in "desperate poverty and disease". There was still considerable discrimination against them and they were worse off than native Americans.

A Malaysian politician, stung by Australian references to racial strife in his country, retaliated by stating that Australia had secured white supremacy in the early days by "shooting Aborigines on sight" and that we should look to our own racial problems before criticising those of other countries.²³

Perhaps the most comprehensive publication on Aborigines written by an overseas author was that of British sociologist, Chris Mullard, (mentioned in Section 2 above), who visited Aboriginal areas in 1976 at the invitation of the National Aboriginal Forum. His book "Aborigines in Australia Today" secured a wide readership at home and abroad. He found Australia to be a racist country and as a result Aborigines "institutionalised, dominated and depressed" .24

An Australian academic, now head of the Department of Applied Psychology at Johannesburg's University of Witwatersrand, James Gardner, declared that Aborigines are so badly treated that even South-African style apartheid would come as a relief. This statement was picked up with glee by the South African press, particularly the comments concerning discriminatory treatment meted out by police. (The Professor was formerly resident in Queensland) 25

New Zealanders heard about the Aboriginal situation from a number of Aboriginal delegates to a Three Nations Conference in Christchurch on "Development and Underdevelopment". Native Americans, Maoris and Pakehas attending the conference, as well as black and white Australians, listened to Aboriginal speakers one after the other review their situation as they saw it. Mention was made of the fact that under the Queensland Aborigines Act an Aborigine can be banished from a reserve and kept from his family.

Racism is rife in Australia, they declared, (giving many instances of discrimination by newspapers and hotels), and the legal system is not geared to assist. They pointed to the high rate of infant mortality in black Australia and to the fact that life expectancy for Aborigines overall is more than 20 years less than for whites.

Hearing so many first hand accounts of an all-pervading discrimination and prejudice, it was inevitable that overseas delegates to the conference should take away a highly unfavourable impression of race relations in Australia.

Knowledge of Aboriginal affairs has spread even to remote areas. A Project Officer of Community Aid Abroad, when on tour through India towards the end of 1980, found his jeep surrounded by some 3000 tribal Lambadas, demonstrating their outrage over the treatment of Aborigines at Noonkanbah. The Lambadas originated in the north of India but were gradually forced to the south. They therefore

felt an affinity with Aborigines after they heard about their situation from an Indian social activist, Mr P.K.S. Madhavan, Chairman of AWARE (Action for Welfare and Awakening in the Rural Environment). The Project Officer concerned, Mr Neil O'Sullivan, faced a crowd which refused to let him pass until he had listened to a tirade of speeches and had pledged to do his utmost to restore Aboriginal rights at Noonkanbah.

6. OVERSEAS COMMENTATORS WITHIN AUSTRALIA

Overseas visitors to Australia, especially those church leaders, academics and political figures who have a particular interest in human rights, have all had their say as to the Aboriginal situation. Pope Paul VI, addressing an Aboriginal gathering during his Australian visit in 1970, declared that Aborigines were entitled to human and civil rights equal to those of the majority:

"We would like to stress that the common good can never be used legitimately as a pretext to harm the positive values of your particular way of life"²⁶

When an Australian church leader, the Rev. Alan Walker, (now Director of Evangelism for the World Methodist Conference), returned to Australia in the following year after spending two weeks in the US at a Methodist Conference, he reported that fellow delegates had expressed the opinion that Australia was a racist nation. He was surprised at the extent to which he had had Australian racism "thrown back" at him.²⁷

A leading black African churchman, Canon Burgess Carr, appeared to concur with this viewpoint when he declared in the course of an Australian visit in 1972 that Australia was a white racist country and was so seen throughout Africa.

At a later date a leading member of the Young Men's Christian Movement in the US, Mr Joe Fabre, after an Australian visit, stated that Aborigines were in danger of destruction because their culture was not allowed room to continue to exist. He believed that Australia could learn a lot from the US experience with the Native Americans where assimilation programs had failed utterly. He favoured introduction into schools of special education and Aboriginal culture so that it might in future be appreciated.²⁸

Another visiting American churchman, Dr James Cone, a pioneer author in black theology, declared, "Of course you are a racist country... Aborigines are not given respect or dignity by the rest of the society they live in.. .the prevailing attitude is paternalistic and scornful." But he was also "pleased and very surprised that so many sensitive people are concerned with them and working for their basic rights and a proper level

of human decency." He recognised that Aborigines themselves were doing "everything they can in their struggle for equality".

Bishop James Armstrong of Dakota, like his two compatriots, acknowledged the racism inherent in his own country yet stated that he "had seen traces of discrimination at its worst in Queensland" during the course of a visit in October 1979. Some practices such as refusing service to Aborigines in bars and restaurants had not existed in the US for more than 15 years. He felt that the problem was white rather than black, and deplored the racism of some school text books he had seen. Land Rights were the central issue : all Aborigines he had met were agreed that this was so.²⁹

Severe criticism of Australia's racial attitudes and practices has, however, by no means been the sole prerogative of church representatives. Visitors from a variety of countries have come to our shores and have paused to express their concern.

In 1971 a team of 11 young Americans arrived in Australia to study racism in Queensland. Four were American blacks, one a Native American, one a Chicano, and the rest Euro-American. Their religious affiliations represented five denominations including Jewish. They made trips to Brisbane areas where Aborigines congregate after dark, visited Cherbourg Reserve and the Lutheran Hopevale Mission, and also observed a meeting of the radical right wing organisation, the League of Rights, whose central tenets revolve around racism. Their report could not be other than unfavourable and angered a number of Queensland church members and others who apparently felt that Queensland had too much to hide in Aboriginal and Islander areas to expose them to the eager eyes of overseas enquirers.³⁰

A Native American activist, Ms Janet McLeod, considered that the US was not as racist as Australia:

"In America the Indians have at least hope whereas here there is racism and apathy in every policy."

Nevertheless, she found "an awakening among young white people in Australia" concerning Aboriginal rights.³¹

In the same year, 1974, a visiting Papua-New Guinean, Mr. Kumulau Tawaii, of Port Moresby, expressed fears that bitterness and violence could erupt unless most white Australians changed their attitudes to Aborigines. He met "many white Australians who admitted the Aborigines' plight was a result of mistakes the white people had made over the past 200 years ... but many people do not face the truth." He was "deeply impressed by the lack of bitterness towards white people shown by the Aboriginal leaders he had met" but feared that they would become frustrated if whites continued to refuse to listen.³²

The leader of the South-West African Organisation Women's Executive in that same year appealed to Australians to do more for Aborigines:

"The condition of their lives must be improved. They need to be given areas of their own so they can develop and preserve their own cultures."³³

Also in 1974 Australia was declared "Second only to South Africa in racism" by visiting black British sociologist, Chris Mullard (mentioned above):

"Whichever way the Aboriginal turns, whatever he does, he is bombarded with the racist spears of domination, oppression, exploitation and social and political control."³⁴

Mullard's outspoken criticism was to seem bland by the following year when British freelance writer and author, Juliet Mitchell, told a press conference at the "Women in Politics" conference in Canberra that Australia was in fact as racist as South Africa. She found agreement among other overseas speakers, who expressed revulsion at Queensland's discriminatory legislation, the Aborigines Act and the Torres Strait Islanders Act.

A short time later the headlines were caught by a visiting American sociologist, Dr Kathleen Hill. Her research on two Aboriginal reserves in Western Australia led her to describe housing there as being "below any imaginable standard", having no access to water, no adequate means for preparing food or washing clothes, and absolutely no privacy.

Additionally, the research covered prejudiced attitudes from whites who saw "the natives" as attaching themselves to white centres with their growing numbers being viewed negatively.³⁵ She felt that, "On a day to day basis Australians have established an informal self-perpetuating system of apartheid. This results in Aborigines being discriminated against in education, employment and training". She believed that the role of the police was important in ensuring white dominance and found little ordinary human contact between black and white.³⁶

It is not only visitors to Australia, however, who discover the situation of Aborigines and voice their sense of shock. Many Australians travelling overseas have found themselves looked at askance by people of other countries who have some knowledge of race relations in this country. One such, Dr H.C. Coombs, on returning from a visit to Japan, indicated this experience. He found that Australia's image overseas was not good because of our treatment of Aborigines and though this image was not totally correct yet there were some elements of truth in the accusations.

Aboriginal groups in Australia have from time to time contacted Embassies in Australia in order to draw their attention and that of their home governments to the Aboriginal situation. Embassy staff have responded in some instances by going on tours of inspection to verify the reports received. A recent example was the visit by a senior official of the Japanese Embassy, Mr Masayuki Shimomura, to the Northern Territory, where he made contact with the Aboriginal communities of Daly Creek, Alice Springs, Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Darwin, the better to be able to report to his Government.

7. AUSTRALIA'S IMAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Australians travelling abroad often note that their country rarely rates a mention unless it is on the sports pages of newspapers. Mentions that we do get, however, often relate to Aboriginal affairs and are by no means favourable.

When a special panel was set up in the UK in the early 1970's to publicise the plight of Aborigines (entitled the Movement to Combat Australian Racism) there was a spate of articles and letters to newspaper editors which drew attention to the fact that

"Aborigines are the unlucky Australians. Many of them still live under dictatorial control on reserves which were once their tribal land. They face similar hardships to black South Africans."⁷

The Soviet Newsagency, TASS, attacked Australian Federal and State Governments for refusing to revoke "racist laws". It was maintained that Aborigines were

"herded into reservations; the plight of those who manage to leave the reservations is hardly better. They live in city slums in squalor and poverty."

The report went on to claim that, despite the urging of public opinion, the Governments of Australia "stubbornly refuse to heed the call of the times, still regarding the Aborigines as second-rate citizens".³⁸

New Zealand newspaper readers have also received highly unfavourable accounts of Aboriginal affairs. One such read:

"There is little doubt that the degree of racism and intolerance practised against the Australian Aborigine constitute some of the worst racial subjugation in the world, but many Australians deny this by pretending 'the Aboriginal problem', as it is paternalistically called, does not exist.., intolerance towards or non-recognition of Aborigines acts as a convenient lid of redlity- which if lifted would reveal discomfoting evidence of the saga of repression since the first phase of European settlement. White consciences are salved simply by refusing to acknowledge the existence of a problem ."³⁹

As has been mentioned in Section 1 above, the Noonkanbah controversy and subsequent appeal to the UN gained a record amount of international publicity. Typical of editorial comment in the US was the Denver Post which compared the Noonkanbah protests with those earlier confrontations between Native Americans and mining companies in the US. It concluded by stating a belief that we now live in an age where we should respect the beliefs of all cultural groups since

"We are all fellow passengers on a frail spaceship called earth with each of us no more equal than the least."⁴⁰

A recent article in the British New Statesman on Australia included the comment that

"There is a kind of casual racism at every level of society that is all the more frightening because it is aimless."⁴¹

African nations also have the Aboriginal situation under surveillance. The Nigerian Observer carried a page one headline "Apartheid in Australia" and quoted Aboriginal Leader Gordon Briscoe, who had recently visited Nigeria, as saying:

"The blacks in Australia are so oppressed that they have become dependent on the whites for almost every facet of human endeavour".

8. COMMONWEALTH GAMES 1982

Aboriginal people have for some time past decided that they would use the occasion of the Commonwealth Games, scheduled to take place in Brisbane in 1982, in order to publicise their demands, especially those relating to the Queensland Government. They have formed a Queensland Aboriginal Protest Group which is advocating a boycott of the Games unless meaningful negotiations take place between the State Government and themselves concerning their chief demands, which are:

- Self-management on reserves
- Economic independence
- Full ownership of reserves
- Recognition of Land Rights
- Rights of privacy
- Ownership of houses on reserves.

They have already had support from some of the black countries concerned. The Zimbabwe Herald recently published a news item in support of a boycott of the Games stating that "Aborigines experience discrimination in every area of life". The newspaper went on to declare:

"While Australia is an affluent country most Aborigines suffer extreme poverty with a high infant mortality rate, a high incidence of malnutrition, poor housing, poor education and training, and an unemployment rate of around 50 per cent."⁴⁴

The Australia-Nigeria Friendship Association has approached African members of the Commonwealth asking them to protest against Queensland's race policies. They believe it possible that a number of African nations will stay away. (Those concerned are Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Lesotho and Ghana).

The President of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, Abraham Ordia, visited Australia in March 1981 to ascertain the local situation both as to treatment of Aborigines and the Australian Government's stand on apartheid. The impression he gained in his 12 day visit could well decide whether African nations attend or boycott the 1982 Games in Brisbane.

CONCLUSION

It might be thought that in this document we have been selective in our approach, only using statements which are critical of the Aboriginal situation and ignoring the rest. Sadly we have to report that there is no "rest". We searched in vain for overseas comments which praise Australia's treatment of its Aboriginal population which patted us on the back and told us what a good job we were doing. The world perception of Aboriginal-white relations and the present-day situation of Aborigines varies from the mildly admonitory to the virulently critical.

As we well know, not all white Australians are racist, not all policies discriminatory, but 200 years of oppression and neglect remain to be overcome. It is not enough to let things drift on as they are, hoping that they will improve. We in Australia sometimes find it easy to ignore the Aboriginal plight, with all its inequalities and injustices, but other countries have shown increasingly critical interest in their situation.

It is likely that in the very near future Australia will receive the same pressures from her international friends and enemies, particularly in the field of sport and in the realm of the United Nations, as does South Africa now. It is not too late to ward off such ignominy. Strong support for all those Aboriginal and governmental bodies which are fighting prejudice and discrimination and endeavouring to bring about a more just situation will assist our country to hold up its head in the international arena and say with confidence, "We are not a racist country".

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