



CHARTER

CHRISTIANS for an ETHICAL SOCIETY

Working Group of NSW Ecumenical Council
Associate Member of ACT Churches' Council Inc

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Objectives

To strengthen social justice and ethical structures in Australia, to promote social justice as a core Christian value, and to further public education in ethics, current social justice issues and the Christian perspective on them.

Preamble

A core element of an ethical society is a commitment to social justice, which is an intrinsic, non-negotiable element of Christianity. Social justice is the application in society of the Gospel teaching to love one's neighbour as an expression of the Love of God. The imperative to seek social justice is grounded in both the inherent worth and dignity of the individual and the interconnectedness of all beings in the web of life. This view is informed by the Christian scriptures, theological reflection and insights of social, political, economic and bio/scientific analysis. In the spirit of the beatitudes, our commitment to bringing about the Kingdom of God implies that we must ensure that the poor and downcast are heard and cared for.

The Core Principles of an Ethical Society

Central to our interpretation of an ethical society is the idea of the common good. The common good requires consideration of, and action for, the well-being of all in the community. Recognizing that wealth is ultimately a common possession, the common good emphasizes the interests of all, including future generations, not just those of a privileged few or of the present generation. Likewise, cultural diversity and individual difference are respected as contributions to the common good. The common good, therefore, requires that governments govern for all affected by their actions while especially protecting the rights of all to whom they are responsible. At the same time, they should operate within a wider vision recognising that State action which is in the best interest of the global community is also in the best interest of our nation.

In the pursuit of the common good, the following principles are applicable:

1. Recognition that all people everywhere are children of God
2. Forgiveness in recognising our fallen natures
3. Mutuality and solidarity in fulfilling our responsibilities
4. Elimination of harmful social divisions through inclusiveness and hospitality
5. Special concern for action in favour of the weak, disadvantaged and vulnerable
6. Participation in democratic processes by those affected by decisions
7. Obligation on decision makers to consult openly with stakeholders to the greatest extent possible
8. Equitable access for all people without discrimination to participation in society and to its resources
9. Fairness and generosity in sharing society's resources
10. Preservation and enhancement of the environment for the benefit of future generations

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Our Perspective

Fundamental to our interpretation of these principles and the following guidelines is our understanding that humanity is one human family within a universal bond of solidarity. Australian society, its aspirations and its needs must always be considered, therefore, in relation to our responsibilities toward global justice and the international community. Furthermore, the human family's special responsibilities to all life forms within the biosphere and its responsibilities to future generations impose on us the obligation to nurture, preserve and conserve the natural world.

Guidelines for policy and action

1. Society is regarded as a community, not merely as an economy, and the desires of the rich do not override the needs of other members of the community, particularly the disadvantaged.
2. Market forces are guided and regulated to the extent necessary to promote community interests, including human rights.
3. Natural resources and the rights of future generations are effectively protected by appropriate laws and practices, which also ensure the healing of past damage.
4. Advancing prosperity leaves no one behind; not children, retired people, carers, disabled, ethnic communities or any other vulnerable or neglected groups.
5. The interests of Australia's indigenous peoples are taken into account in all economic and social planning so as to ensure that they share in the benefits of economic activity, receive redress for past wrongs, exclusion and disempowerment, and access their human rights to the same extent as other Australians.
6. Globally, priority is given to those countries whose economies are burdened by abject poverty, unmanageable international debt and those who are victims of unfair international trading conditions.
7. Governments create the appropriate environment and allocate the necessary resources so that civil society can flourish at all levels, from the local to the global, and people can participate in the shaping of the future for themselves and the world.
8. Governments operate transparently, publishing accurately the rationalisations for their policies and being accountable to the highest standards of public integrity.

The challenge of global poverty

Christians for an Ethical Society gives full support to the eight United Nations Millennium Goals to be achieved by 2015 (see www.un.org/millenniumgoals) to which all member countries of the United Nations have committed:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

These goals exemplify principles and guidelines outlined in this charter.

Co-operation with others and other organizations

Finally, we pledge our support to social and public policy which is designed to promote the common good in Australia and all countries of the world. In working towards this goal, Christians for an Ethical Society seeks to join with all persons of goodwill, regardless of their religious beliefs, who share this ethical vision and who, in their own ways and through their own organizations, are similarly focussed on these ends.