

# *Mercy Advocacy*

*“...and the truth  
will make you free.”*

*- John 8:32*



*Seeding the Future with Others*

*March 2015*





Two disturbing reports - '**Closing the Gap**' and '**The Forgotten Children**' were delivered to the Federal Parliament in the same week in February. These reports concern areas we have chosen for advocacy. Underlying the horrors revealed in both is a disregard for the yearnings of fellow human beings. The surface response of political-blaming and point-scoring distorts the focus on the actual harm being done to those whom Jesus calls our brothers and sisters. As the Indigenous senator, Nova Peris said:

*"If we are fair dinkum about this we've got to stop playing political football with Aborginal people."*

Only a single word change and the same statement holds for asylum seekers.



## **Where do we Christians fit into this?**

In our response we have to look at what we understand by violence and non-violence. We might judge an action as either disturbance of the peace or illegal - be it a march through the streets, a dangerous sea journey, the overturning of tables in the temple... What we fail to see is the violence of laws and policies that deprive human beings of their dignity, freedom, rights, and even sanity.

The '**Closing the Gap**' report shows that, of the original seven targets only two - Indigenous mortality for children under five and year 12 attainment - are on track. Budget cuts on services to Indigenous Australians, to women fleeing violence and to the disproportionate numbers of imprisoned have further widened the gap. In media reports much attention has been given to parliamentary dissension over the mention of such funding changes, but Indigenous leaders want the reality of their peoples' situation to be recognized.



## **This month marks the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Ride, a remarkable journey to campaign for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples rights.**

In Australia, echoing the civil rights movement in the United States, the Freedom Ride was an inspiring journey through New South Wales from 12 to 26 February 1965. Led by the late Charles Perkins, a group of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students from the University of Sydney travelled around towns by bus to expose discrimination, rally people against the injustice of segregation, and give a voice to Aboriginal peoples. The Freedom Ride served as an inspiration for, and a precursor to, the **1967 Referendum**, where Australia overwhelmingly voted to allow Aboriginal people to enjoy the same rights and protections as all other Australians. This year, fifty years on, we celebrate the legacy of the Freedom Riders, our journey forward to reconciliation, and the campaign to formally recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's Constitution. (*Reconciliation - February e-Newsletter*).

Likewise with the '*Forgotten Children*' report, it was a case of shoot the messenger rather than hear the message. The government has launched an extraordinary attack on the Human Rights Commission and the other side has largely held its silence - for fear of closer examination?

The report has been collated from interviews with 1,129 children and families, 41 witnesses at five public hearings, a total of 239 submissions received from schools, medical service providers and NGOs and observations from internationally recognised medical experts. It makes for shocking reading. The findings on children in detention leave no doubt about the report's credibility.

The Human Rights Commission emphasises that Australia is the only country in the world that practises the mandatory and indefinite detention of children. This is a clear violation of their rights under the Convention for the Rights of Children.

- Children as young as three years old were suffering clinical depression and 34% had a mental health disorder
- A number of children were on suicide watch



- 30 allegations of sexual assault had been reported
- More than 300 children committed or threatened self-harm in a 15-month period
- Nearly 30 children went on hunger strike
- More than 200 children were involved in assaults

**This is systemic and institutionalised child abuse.**

All the major parties are doing is arguing over who is to blame. The Prime Minister has dismissed the report as a 'blatantly partisan politicised exercise.' They are avoiding the real and serious issues at stake.

**The Human Right's Commission** have recommended that a **Royal Commission** be held into placing children in detention.



## Possible Responses/Action:

### A. *Closing the Gap*

- Read the Sydney Morning Herald article where the CEO Northern Land Council, Joe Morrison, shares his views on the referendum
- Send a message of support to Senator Nova Peris:  
Senate Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600  
Email: [senator.peris@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.peris@aph.gov.au)
- Send a message of concern on the failure to meet the targets for Closing the Gap to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion:  
Senate Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600  
Email: [senator.scullion@aphgov.au](mailto:senator.scullion@aphgov.au)
- Attend the movie **SELMA** dealing with Martin Luther King's struggle for civil rights
- Listen to Archie Roach, the song-maker
- Call on leaders to get actively promote the referendum

### B. *The Forgotten Children*

- Read the '**Forgotten Children**' Report  
<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/forgotten-children-national-inquiry-children-immigration-detention-2014>
- Send a message of support to the Human Rights Commission(er):  
Professor Gillian Triggs  
GPO Box 5218  
Sydney NSW 2001
- Call, write, or email your local member of Parliament /Senators (and Cc our Brisbane based Minister for Immigration, Peter Dutton)  
**Demand that:**  
All children be immediately removed from detention (including Nauru)  
A Royal Commission is held into children being put in detention.

You can find all the local members' and Senators' details here:

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Guidelines\\_for\\_Contacting\\_Senators\\_and\\_Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Guidelines_for_Contacting_Senators_and_Members)





The life of **Archie Roach**, singer and songwriter, has been filled with hardship and heartache. Taken away from his family when he was three he became disconnected from his people and culture. In recent years he has endured the loss of his wife and partner in song, Ruby Hunter, as well as serious illness - a stroke and lung cancer. His music and his connection with his audience who ‘have lifted him up’ have been for him the constant.

US music promoter and publicist Alison Pearl, remembers her adopted country on her arrival here in the nineties:

*“I was astonished to hear such fantastic music by a handful of Indigenous musicians. I was trying to learn about their history, and found little that shed any light on what’s transpired here. When I heard Archie’s ‘Took the Children Away’, I finally felt I learned the truth, rather than any facts, about what’s gone down.”*

### *And healing?*

As someone who had come so close to losing his life, in his resurrection Archie has a message that is pure and almost evangelical.

*“I have learned how wonderful and beautiful life is. It is constant. We might change but life doesn’t. The wonder and beauty of life will never change. As long as we understand and embrace that. Life is there for you to embrace and to realise that you are a part of life and you are beautiful.”*

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