

# *Mercy Advocacy*

*'As Pontifex, Latin for 'bridge-builder,' Pope Francis told the US Congress that it is his 'duty to build bridges and to help all men and women, in any way possible to do the same'. This is pope of encounter and dialogue reminds us:*

*"Walls are never solutions...  
But bridges are, always, always."*



*Seeding the Future with Others*

*November 2015*

*How we can turn the walls in  
our heart into bridges*



## Giving a protester a hug



*Photo Cynthia DeBoutinkhar, Facebook*

Mid -October, an anti-Islamic social media campaign 'Global Rally for Humanity' organised protests at 20 mosques and Islamic centres across America and other parts of the

world. At the Noor Islamic Cultural Centre in Columbus, Ohio, one lone protester, Annie, turned up with her signs protesting Islam. A counter-protester Naziri, a PhD student of near-east religions, admired her courage and decided to engage. Annie remained staunchly opposed to anything associated with Islam. She accused the Koran of stealing stories from the Bible and referred to Islam as a 'glorified death cult'. President Obama, she said, is a secret Muslim. Citing prophecy, she said that a nuclear-armed Iran will eventually destroy Israel and Mecca. Eventually she admitted to having had Muslim friends online at one point, but noted that they had a falling out due to a disagreement over Israel. And yet she said the real reason she decided to protest was to call for an end to needless killing.

The protester, known only as Annie, with her signs outside the Noor Islamic Cultural Centre.



*"I feel so passionately because I see children being raped and tortured and it breaks my heart," she told Naziri, referring to humanitarian atrocities in unspecified Islamic countries.*

A member of this mosque, ***Cynthia DeBoutinkhar*** made the next move:

*"Something came over me and I went up to her and asked if I could give her a hug. I wouldn't let go of the hug. I felt her body go from tense to soft and I asked her to please come inside with me. She was actually AFRAID. I asked if I look scary to her. She said I didn't. I promised her I'd stay by her side the whole time."*

There followed a welcome by the mosque president, accompanied by food and drink, a visit to the women's room where Cynthia removed her hijab, a complete tour of the mosque, a discussion of where Annie sourced her information on Islam (Fox News and Donald Trump), the asking and answering of questions, an invitation accepted to join the women during prayer and a gift of an English translation of the Quran.



Photo *Cynthia DeBoutinkhar*, Facebook



Annie's parting words:

*“You were really nice. I didn't approve of the violence or killings (neither do we, says Cynthia) but I'll read this book. I had no idea Muslims could be so nice to me, even after I stood out there with those signs. Sorry.”*

She left without her signs.



**In Australia** there is a long history of Muslim presence - from the Makassar fishermen coming since the sixteenth century from the Indonesian archipelago to the north of the continent seeking the trepang (dugong) for the Chinese market through the 'Afghan' cameleers opening up the Centre, the 'Syrian' Lebanese of the 1880's, the Albanian Muslims of the 1920's-30's, later migrants from countries such as Bosnia, Turkey and Lebanon and more recently refugees from conflicts in the Middle East. There are now Muslims from at least 60 different countries living in Australia.

**Twitter reaction highlights the case for a new conversation on Islam**

On 13 October, in Parliament, the PM Malcolm Turnbull marked National Unity Day by reaffirming our need to be strong and resolute in our unity in the face of those who would seek to divide us.





On the same day in actively seeking to build bridges, ***Monique Toohey***, a Muslim who runs a psychology clinic in outer north Melbourne accompanied by

***Tasneem Chopra***, Cross Cultural Consultant, Curator, Immigration Museum, Chairperson, Australian Muslim Women's Centre, met with a group of Labor MP's to argue for a change in tone of Australia's conversation about the threat posed by violent extremism and how best to de-radicalise young alienated Muslims. If she needed proof of the point she was making she didn't have to wait.

Within seconds of ***Tanya Plibersek*** tweeting a picture of the encounter, the two MP's facilitating the meeting were inundated with a torrent of negative comments, some of them vile and offensive.

*“This has never happened to me before on Twitter, ever.”*

later said one of the MP's, ***Clare O'Neil***.

For ***Ms Toohey*** the reaction was just another example of the dynamic of bullying, where an attack on one Muslim is vicariously felt across the entire community.

***Tasneem Chopra*** grew up in Bendigo when racism was reserved for the local Indigenous population.



*“Even though I was a brown girl in a white block, the Islam factor was very innocuous. Muslims in those days were Arabs with flying carpets and four wives who didn't eat pork. That was fine. It didn't make me feel threatened. Fast-forward to 2015, where I have three teenage kids who I can't allow to go jogging, and a daughter I can't allow to walk from the station by herself.”*

Their message to MP's on both sides was to consult before rolling out de-radicalisation and other programs and to speak to the Muslim community, not at it.

**Ms Chopra** says there has been a promising change in tone from the Prime Minister since Malcolm Turnbull assumed the role.

*“But I don't yet feel like it's a whole-of-government response at all.”*

**Joanne Ryan**, Lalor MP, simply asks people to put themselves in the shoes of those who feel under siege:

*"When I get up in the morning I'm not thinking about my kids going to school that day and what they are going to confront -and I think if more Australians understood the impact of this dialogue in people's homes and on children they'd pull back."*

**Michael Gordon** *The Age* 15/10/15



In Sydney, every morning, shortly after sunrise, ***Maha Krayem Abdo***, head of the Muslim Women's Association, current NSW Human Rights Ambassador, mother to four and grandmother to nine, who no longer enjoys walking alone, prays for protection - not just for herself and her family but for Australia and asks:

*“God make today a better one than yesterday.”*  
***Daisy Dumas Sydney Morning Herald: June 13-14 2015***



## **ACTION**

Helping to build bridges

Write to either of the MP's,  
***Clare O'Neil*** [clare.oneil.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:clare.oneil.mp@aph.gov.au) or  
***Joanne Ryan***, [Joanne.Ryan.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Joanne.Ryan.MP@aph.gov.au) or to

Parliament House,  
Canberra ACT 2600

Commending them on reaching out to the two Muslim women, and supporting ***Monique Toohey*** and ***Tasneem Chopra*** in their call for a change in tone of Australia's conversation on how best to de-radicalise young alienated Muslims.



There is a momentum building in the community towards change in refugee policy and practice as more people are disturbed by the visible suffering of those fleeing to Europe as well as by reports from whistle-blowers of what is happening here.

*“Acts of destruction are never impersonal, abstract or merely material. They always have a face, a concrete story, names. In those family members, we see the face of pain, a pain which still touches us and cries out to heaven.”*

- Pope Francis



## **For Extra Reading**

Novelist, **Tom Keneally** has long championed those who, in seeking our protection, have been met with further punishment. With fellow novelist, **Rosie Scott**, he brought together an impressive group of Australian writers in ‘*A Country Too Far*’ to make an eloquent plea, through short stories, poems, memoirs and essays, for us to look past the ‘*venom and cliché*’ and consider a more humane attitude to ‘*the most marginalised people on earth*’. In a recent article in the Sydney Morning Herald,

*“Language should not be used to strip the humanity from those seeking help,”*



*Keneally* explores the 'mis-usages of English language with which, in both major parties, the Australian polity is afflicted'

(See loose-leaf)

Columnist, lecturer in politics, *Waleed Aly*, in the Fairfax press, examines the morality of our refugee policy:

*Doctors' protest over asylum seekers shows us what real morality is all about.*

(See loose-leaf)



## **RECENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS & SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

Asylum seekers and unemployed people do not get public transport concessions in Queensland. This can lead to a lot of missed opportunities and difficulties in keeping food on the table and paying utility bills. The Queensland Government is currently undertaking a public transport review and MDA, with the support of the Queensland Community Alliance and other groups, have developed a petition to advocate for greater access to these concessions. Please consider signing the petition and sending the link to others in your networks:

[http://www.qldcommunityalliance.org/welcome\\_campaign](http://www.qldcommunityalliance.org/welcome_campaign)



*Transfield Services*, now to be renamed **Broadspectrum** continues to run the detention centres where grave abuses are occurring on Manus Is and Nauru. Join the petition expressing concern to Chairwoman Diane Smith-Gander.

[http://transfieldservicespetition-sarahinthesenate.nationbuilder.com/?recruiter\\_id=327130](http://transfieldservicespetition-sarahinthesenate.nationbuilder.com/?recruiter_id=327130)

Write to your local member in support of the recently established *cross-party interfaith Task Force* seeking a better way forward in the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Parliamentary members **Anna Burke** (ALP), **Russell Broadbent** (Lib) **Sen. Sarah Hanson-Young** (Greens) **Cathy McGowan** (IND) and faith leaders such as **Sr Berneice Loch rsm**, **Sr Anne Lane pbvm** and **Rabbi Alon Meltzer**.

Listen to/purchase the newly released '*Scattered People*' album '*Sugarmill Road*' (named after the road leading to Pinkenba Detention Centre where the songs were born) Note especially the rendition of the '*On the turning away*' a Pink Floyd number listened to clandestinely in her country and now sung here by an Iranian asylum seeker.

[www.scatteredpeople.com/preview.html](http://www.scatteredpeople.com/preview.html)

Teachers and medical personnel here and throughout the country are organising in opposition to indefinite detention, especially of children. Write to your local MP as a teacher/nurse/... supporting their stance and requesting policies that respect the dignity



and wellbeing of asylum seekers. Congratulate Lady Cilento Hospital staff on their recent public stand. Ask other Brisbane Hospitals what is their position on patients being returned to detention.

Visit YouTube

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_pax\\_2tCZrk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pax_2tCZrk)

to enjoy the exuberance of ‘*Jump up and Down for kids*’ - in detention

*Pope Francis asks insistently why poverty exists and is allowed to continue. He names and criticises strongly a framework of relationships that privileges individual and corporate profit over the common good and exploits technology without ethical controls.*

*Andy Hamilton SJ - Eureka Street 28/10/15*



## **The battle over the Adani coalmine**



Photo: Glenn Campbell

Aboriginal advocates have asked the UN's Special Rapporteur to investigate if the mine would violate international law.

We've heard much about opposition to the Adani Carmichael mine in the Galilee Basin by environmentalists and farmers and of the federal government's attempts to pass laws



limiting the right to protest to those judged to be directly affected.

However, perhaps we know less of the action by Aboriginal advocates, ***Adrian Burragubba*** and ***Murrawah Johnson***, representing the people of the land, the Wangan and Jagalingou. They have been calling on the UN to investigate if the mine violates international law and to urge the federal and Queensland governments to reject it. They allege the mine would violate a number of rights of the traditional owners, including rights to culture, rights to “*free, prior and informed consent*” and the right to give or withhold consent to “*the development of significant extractive industries on our land.*”

In their submission they say;

*“By supporting and facilitating the Carmichael coalmine, Australia is thus violating its duty to protect our fundamental universally recognised human rights.”*

***Adani*** denies lack of consultation and the federal government passes responsibility to the state. The project has now been approved by the federal government but groups, including the traditional land owners, continue their challenge to the mine.

*Our ancestral homelands in central western Queensland are threatened with devastation by the proposed development by a private company Adani mining of the massive Carmichael coal mine. If developed as*



*proposed, the mine would be among the largest coal mines in the world. It would permanently destroy vast swathes of our traditional lands and waters including a complex of springs that we hold sacred as the starting point of our life and through which our dreaming totem, the Mundunjudera (also known as the Rainbow Serpent) travelled to form the shape of the land. We exist as people of the land and water and all things in and on them - plants and animals - have special meaning for us and tell us who we are. Our land and waters are our culture and our identity. If they are destroyed we will become nothing.*

**Victoria Tauli-Corpuz** - Extract from letter to the UN special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights.



## **ACTION**

- Support the Indigenous claim to have their rights respected by writing to the Environment Minister, **Greg Hunt**. [Greg.Hunt.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Greg.Hunt.MP@aph.gov.au)
- Sign online petition started by **Adrian Burragubba** and help it reach 100,000:  
<https://www.communityrun.org/petitions/don-t-let-adani-build-their-huge-coal-mine-on-our-traditional-land>

Feel free to share the Advocacy folder with anyone interested.



*For Christ himself has brought peace to us.  
He united Jews and Gentiles into one  
people when, in his own body on the cross,  
he broke down the wall of hostility that  
separated us.*

*Eph 2:14*





**Compiled by Genevieve Caffery and Dolores Creevey**

**on behalf of the Members of the Reference Group**

