

Proposal 9

UNITING WORLD WA COMMITTEE

Support for Papua

That the Synod:

- acknowledge the long commitment of the Synod of Western Australia to supporting the Uniting Church in Australia partner Gereja Kristen Injili Indonesia di Tanah Papua (GKI-TP), and our continuing concerns regarding human rights in Papua.
- commit to praying for the people of Papua and affirm the support to our partner church and advocacy of the Uniting Church in Australia, National Assembly in relation to Papua.
- encourage the congregations, schools and agencies of the Synod to support the Australian-Papuan Cultural Exchange Program (APCEP) by providing sufficient resources to enable the full functioning of the Program.
- affirm the work of the Black Pearl Network, in collaboration with the UnitingWorld Committee WA, in providing support for development projects in Papua.

Rationale

Human Rights

Following the most recent trip of the Black Pearl Network (BPN)¹ in June 2016 to the Land of Papua, participants reported that concerns about human rights were often raised. During the visit there were demonstrations in a number of suburbs/areas (15th June, 2016) resulting in reports of mass arrests and other human rights concerns. This echoed similar reports from other peaceful demonstrations over the previous year and there have since been further concerning reports.

At that same time, Stuart McMillan, President of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), received a letter from Rev Albert Yoku, Moderator of GKI-TP, dated 14 June 2016, asking us, as the Uniting Church in Australia, to give our “attention to the high political tension in Papua.” Rev Yoku went on to highlight four key areas of concern:

“One is the freedom of expression, the second is the monopoly of our natural resources, the third is human rights violations, and the fourth is the history and the debate on the integration of Papua into Indonesia.”²

In response to that letter, on 27 June 2016, Mr McMillan called the people of the Uniting Church to pray for our Papuan brothers and sisters in Christ as the Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua (GKI-TP) lead their people through troubled times.

¹ For an explanation of the BPN please see the last section below.

² <http://www.unitingworld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Letter-from-GKI-TP.jpg>



Mr McMillan said, “We are deeply troubled by the situation in Papua as expressed by our partner church. We express solidarity with GKI-TP, in its ministry of peace and reconciliation, and in its call for all Papuans to be granted an effective voice in determining their own futures.”³

Rev Steve Francis, Moderator of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia (WA Synod) also wrote a pastoral letter on July 1, 2016 to all congregations in WA to communicate the President’s message. The WA Synod has repeatedly expressed concern over reported human rights violations since 2002 and called for dialogues to end discrimination, violence and militarisation. In its most recent resolution on the issue in 2010 the Synod agreed by consensus to:

Note the concerns of the Uniting Church in Australia’s partner church in the Provinces of Papua and West Papua, Indonesia — the GKI di Tanah Papua (the Evangelical Christian Church in Papua) — that the Special Autonomy status offered by the Republic of Indonesia in 2000 has “failed to fulfil the aspirations of Papuan people”; and call on Foreign Affairs Minister Kevin Rudd to encourage the Indonesian Government to engage in a national dialogue with Papua regarding:

- the ongoing discrimination and violence against Papuans;
- the current social, political, economic and cultural marginalisation of Papuans;
- the militarisation of the Papuan province; and
- the desire for self-determination by the Papuan people.

To enable a fair and just dialogue to occur, the Synod ask that this dialogue be mediated by an independent third party.

The Assembly has also advocated for improvements to human rights in Papua as it has been a long-term partner to GKI-TP through its relief and development agency UnitingWorld. It has continued to stand in solidarity with the people of Papua and passed in 2012 UCA National Assembly resolution:

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- (a) continue to express solidarity with the people of Papua by resourcing and supporting our partner church, the Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua, in its ministry of peace and reconciliation, and in its call to for all Papuans to have an effective voice in determining their future;
- (b) welcome President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s stated commitment to working with the churches in Papua to end violence, and, with our partner church, call on the Indonesian Government to withdraw military forces from a security role among local communities in Papua, to hand all these responsibilities to the police, and to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice;
- (c) affirm initiatives taken by the Synod of Western Australia, the Synod of South Australia and Uniting Church congregations and communities with UnitingWorld as the Uniting Church in Australia engages in Papua;

³ <http://www.unitingworld.org.au/call-pray-brothers-sisters-west-papua/>



- (d) encourage more Uniting Church communities to engage in similar actions; and
- (e) express to the Australian Government our concerns for Papua and call on the Australian Government to support initiatives that involve peace, reconciliation and the development of an effective voice for all Papuans regarding their future.

Rob Floyd, National Director of UnitingWorld has explained in a Briefing Paper on UCA relations with Papua, issued 23 June 2016, that:

“The UCA is also member of International Coalition for Papua (ICP). This ecumenical organisation monitors human rights conditions, publishes reports, supports dialogue with the Indonesian Government, and voices international concerns through the WCC and the UNHRC.”⁴

The World Council of Churches central committee, has also made a statement concerning Papua during its recent meeting in Trondheim, Norway, 22-28 June 2016. In its minute on the “Human Rights Situation in West Papua” it:

Calls on all WCC member churches to pray and act in support of the witness of the churches – especially the Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua, and through the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) – for justice and peace in the region.

Requests that a solidarity visit to West Papua by an international ecumenical delegation be organized as soon as possible, to demonstrate the ecumenical movement’s accompaniment of the churches in the region, to hear the voices of the victims of violence and human rights violations, and to pursue the pilgrimage of justice and peace in this context.⁵

APCEP

The Australian-Papuan Cultural Exchange Program (APCEP) aims to promote peace-building through mutual exchange. Young adult Papuan students are selected and sponsored for a 12 week immersion program in which they live in Perth with host families and engage in English language classes and cultural visits.

APCEP is a response to the on-going long standing partnership between WA Synod congregations, UnitingWorld WA Committee and the GKI-TP.

By participating in APCEP, students will be better placed to secure work in government and international corporations which are working in Papua. They will be more fluent in English and more competent in the kind of skills required to participate in higher education and professional employment opportunities – such as time management, financial accountability and responsibility. It has been particularly encouraging to see previous students of the

⁴ <http://www.unitingworld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/UnitingWorld-Briefing-Paper-on-Papua-June-2016.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2016/minute-on-human-rights-situation-in-west-papua>



Program return to Papua to run their own beginner English classes with their church youth groups, thus multiplying the impact of the Program.

APCEP has already been run successfully several times with significant benefit experienced by both the visiting students and the host congregations. There are currently at least 5 Uniting Church congregations engaged in administering some component of the Program. The program costs around \$23,500 and this does not include the living expenses for the students whilst they are in Perth. Living costs are borne by the host families who undertake a 12 week commitment to host the students. Students themselves are required to fundraise the cost of their airfares with the support of their home congregations and communities.

There are significant logistical and administrative requirements to be coordinated to ensure the smooth running of the Program, with roles including:

- Fundraising
- Hosting
- English Teaching
- Transport
- Activities Coordination
- Immigration Liaison
- Conversation Partners

To ensure the sustainability of the program into the future and to spread the benefit of the Program across more congregations, a wider base of support and involvement is required from across the Synod.

Please note, the future of the Program is also contingent on the approval of a new Special Visa agreement with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection since the current agreement for the Program expires at the end of 2017.

Black Pearl Network

The Black Pearl Network (BPN) is officially a sub-group of the Creative Living Centre operating out of the Floreat Uniting Church, however its activities now include members from a number of Uniting Church congregations including Trinity North UC, Scarborough & Waterman's Bay UC, Star St UC, Foothills St Martin's UC and North Midlands congregations.

The BPN operates through the UnitingWorld Committee WA in its relationships with the Uniting Church partner church GKI-TP.

The name 'Black Pearl Network' was suggested to the group by their Papuan contacts since the Papuan people are colloquially referred to as 'Black Pearls' by other Indonesians. The Papuan people have adopted the label with pride and were pleased the Network has also taken it as a name.

The BPN have been operating in Papua for nearly a decade, developing strong relationships and supporting a multitude of development initiatives at the request of our partners. A significant project focus has been APCEP, but other initiatives include support for LEMAK –



a sanitation and water organisation; development of an English language program in Sarmi district; support for the Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation within our partner church GKI-TP plus numerous discussions and small-scale support for the development of health clinics in the Highlands regions.

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