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## From the Executive Director Alistair Gee



It seems that as soon as Christmas has come to its end, Easter is upon us. Chocolate eggs and hot cross buns appear in stores all around the country at the bat of an eyelid. Each year the gap between both dates seems to become closer and sometimes, meaning gets a bit lost.

The work of raising awareness of these most important dates is done for us. Our challenge as Christians, is to encourage and help people to look beyond the trimmings and find out why the birth of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross changed the world, changed the calendar and continues to shape humankind.

act for peace works for the poor and oppressed, in resolving conflicts and reducing extreme poverty as an expression of Jesus' love. Matthew 25: 31-46 tells us to give to the hungry and thirsty what they need, clothe the naked and care for the sick. act for peace works through local church partners who are part of the local communities. They know the needs of the people and have the capacity to

deliver effective responses.

Take, for example, the work of Gladys Mananyu, Peace and Justice Project Officer with the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), our partner for almost two decades. Gladys has been with the SCC since 1994 and is currently responsible for their Eastern Equatorial Region Peace and Justice program.

Gladys recently told us, "I talk to communities about peace building and support their peace initiatives. I also identify people within the church for training in peace building and conflict transformation. Church leaders who are trained will have great impact on the way they deal with conflict in their communities, by determining early warning signs. Peace education, human rights, social and cultural rights and civic education are some of the key topics in the training." The training program costs \$388 AU per person.

"Small arms and light weapons are other important issues with the peace and justice program, as we educate the people on the effect small arms have on security. Many women say they have been empowered by this training and they now talk freely about

their situation and find their voice to say what really needs to be done."

Results such as these only happen because you share the love of Christ and entrust act for peace to work in your name. Your gifts to the Christmas Bowl at Christmas time and gifts throughout the year enable lives to be positively transformed. Thank you for your generous support!

If you wish to act for peace through regular giving and have not yet done so, we encourage you to join this group of special supporters to sustain this vital work throughout the year. Every gift is a blessing and if you cannot make this regular commitment please consider making a single gift. Simply fill in the form enclosed or call Howard or Jordan on 1800 025 101 or email them at [actforpeace@ncca.org.au](mailto:actforpeace@ncca.org.au).

Please join us and act for peace this Easter!

*Yours sincerely,*

**Alistair Gee**

*Executive Director, act for peace*

*email: [agee@ncca.org.au](mailto:agee@ncca.org.au)*

# Tragedy Befalls Gaza

By: *Edwyn Shiell, Marketing & Communication Coordinator and Lisa Giufre, International Program Coordinator*

Shortly after families all over Australia celebrated the birth of Christ, the devastating force of the Israeli 'Cast Lead' Operation against Hamas claimed the lives of more than 1,300 Gazans and 13 Israelis. Of those killed, many were innocent civilians, and a third were women and children.

On Saturday, 17 January, Israeli air strikes and ground incursions stopped with the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire, but many cannot believe the violence has ended. Dr Suhalia Tarazi, Director of the Al Ahli Arab Hospital, remains resilient. "Our philosophy is to provide health care without discrimination of religion, gender, political affiliation and social class," she says. "All patients are equal. That's the church's mission, to help the needy without differences."

"Every moment for 24 hours of each day during the war was a challenge for us. Thank God we could do something. But it was a real massacre in Gaza. Our homes were not safe, the hospital was not safe, the schools were not safe and the streets were



Four health clinics, supported by **act for peace** partners were destroyed by Israeli air strikes.

not safe... Fear has been put in the hearts of the children. It's not easy to forgive, but we have to. We just hope this will stop, and that peace and justice will prevail."

During the 22-day war, four health clinics run by **act for peace's** partners were destroyed. On Saturday, 10 January, the Shija'ia clinic run by **act for peace** partner, the Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR), was completely obliterated by Israeli missiles. No casualties were reported, but medical equipment and six months worth of supplies were incinerated. The clinic was previously servicing up to 50,000 families a year in some of the poorest areas of Gaza.

Constantine Dabbagh, Executive Director of DSPR said, "I cannot express how I felt. I didn't cry, but my heart was aching. For humans to have caused this made it especially shocking."

DSPR's two remaining clinics are still fully operational, and staff are establishing a temporary clinic on a new site, to fill the gaps in service left by the destruction of the Shija'ia clinic. Primary health care and dental services have resumed as well as vocational training classes and psycho-social care for those traumatised by loss of loved ones. Home visits have resumed for expecting mothers and infants suffering from malnutrition. Emergency relief items including 50,000 bottles of water, 23,000 litres of milk and 230,000 high-protein biscuits have also been distributed to survivors.

While the bombs may have stopped falling and news cameras stopped rolling, **act for peace** is still pushing for a proper war crimes investigation into actions by both sides.

We have worked with partners in Gaza for 21 years and will continue to provide dedicated assistance long after international media attention has shifted. We are sending more than \$200,000 to our partners running medical clinics and supplying life-saving items amidst this crisis.

To give to the **act for peace** Gaza appeal, free call 1800 025 101 or go to [www.actforpeace.org.au](http://www.actforpeace.org.au).

## Upcoming Event:

General Secretary of the Sudanese Council of Churches set to visit Australian Congregations

Peter Tibi, the General Secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches, will be visiting Australia in March to promote the work of **act for peace** partners in Sudan and speak about the immense challenges and opportunities facing his people. An agreement to set up a new peace process for Darfur has just been reached. Please pray for this process over the coming months.

**act for peace** in partnership with the Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies, plans to hold a seminar at Sydney University in the early afternoon on Friday, 13 March (to be confirmed). Peter will also speak at churches in Sydney on Sunday, 8 March and in Melbourne on Sunday, 15 March.

If you are interested in attending any of these events, please visit our website for confirmation, of date and time, or call Bryce Fegan on 1800 025 101.



# We must do more than hold our breath for Zimbabwe!

By: *Edwyn Shiell, Marketing & Communication Coordinator and Eleanor Trinchera, International Program Coordinator*

## The Situation

- Over 3,800 lives claimed by the Cholera crisis and 80,000 people diagnosed
- Over five million people, almost half the population, need urgent food aid
- World record hyperinflation of 231 million%
- 90% unemployment
- 94% of rural schools (where most children are educated) have not re-opened

The people of Zimbabwe have been forced to live their lives in the face of unspeakable acts of brutality and persecution under President Mugabe's fierce regime. With the September 2008 power sharing agreement and the swearing in of Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister on 11 February, 2009, the world is holding its breath for the fate of this crippled nation.

**act for peace's** partner, Christian Care Zimbabwe (CCZ), is on the ground providing food aid to address the critical food shortages that has left the people of Zimbabwe starving and more susceptible to the recent outbreak of Cholera. With over half the population in desperate need of food aid, the once prosperous 'food basket' of Africa has become one of the most severely impoverished nations on earth.

**act for peace** is committed to ensuring that the power sharing agreement paves the way for real change which places the Zimbabwean people as its first priority. This year, our partners will provide food to more than 700,000 Zimbabweans and provide community water tanks to health clinics, schools and households

to combat the spread of Cholera and promote the self-sufficiency of families in the Beitbridge, Mbereengwa, Plumtree and Esigodini areas.

Rev. Forbes Matonga, Director of CCZ, said, "There is clear need for the extension of the food aid operations. We need to move away from free hand outs to food for work as a transition from emergency to development. We also see the need to expand the scope of our food aid operations to include Schools Supplementary Feeding to avert malnutrition and increase children's attendance and participation in schools. Secondly, we see need to strengthen our water and sanitation programs especially in schools as a way of responding to the cholera challenge as well as keeping the schools safe!"

We at **act for peace** ask for churches and individuals to stand in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe in prayer, as we passionately oppose the social injustice and oppression

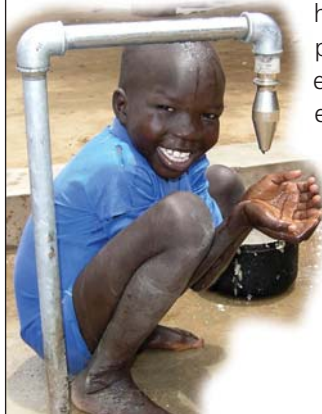


affecting that nation. If you want to support the people of Zimbabwe, simply fill out the enclosed form and return in the Reply-Paid envelope or ring Edwyn Shiell on 1800 025 101.

Rev. Matonga, said, "As a people of faith we remain hopeful and confident that God will remember us and heal our land. May the good Lord honour your service and assistance to the people of Zimbabwe."

## Become an **act for peace** Representative!

**W**ant to be more involved with our work beyond the Christmas Bowl or Regular Giving? **act for peace** Representatives are a vital link between our supporters in Australia and our work around the world. It's a practical way that you can help make a difference by simply handing out materials in church, chatting about our projects with friends, holding small events or by ensuring there are enough Christmas Bowl envelopes in your church at Christmas time.



To register your interest or for more information about becoming an **act for peace** Representative, please ring Edwyn Shiell today on free call **1800 025 101** or email [actforpeace@ncca.org.au](mailto:actforpeace@ncca.org.au).

**act for peace**  
reduce poverty | protect refugees  
prevent conflicts | empower communities

# The Year Ahead!

A few key dates when you or your church can **act for peace** in 2009 with your prayers, your interest and your gifts:

**March: act for peace** Empowers Communities in the Solomon Islands

- *Friday, 13 March* – attend the event at the Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies at Sydney University with Rev. Peter Tibi, General Secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches (final time to be determined – please see [www.actforpeace.org.au](http://www.actforpeace.org.au) for more information)



*Credit: Visier Sanyü*

**April: act for peace** Supports Refugees in Australia

*Support Easter Festivals:*

- *Friday, 10 April* – Good Friday
- *Sunday, 12 April* – Easter Day
- *Monday, 13 April* – Easter Monday

**May: act for peace** Provides Essential Health Services to Palestinians

**June: act for peace** Protects Burmese Refugees

- *4 – 10 June* – World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel
- Tuesday, 30 June – End of the financial year and Regular Giving summary receipts to be sent

**July: act for peace** Empowers Indigenous Communities in the Philippines

**August: act for peace** Builds Peace in Fiji

**September: act for peace** Develops Food Security in Zimbabwe

- *Sunday, 20 September* – International Day of Prayer for Peace
- *Sunday, 27 September* – Social Justice Sunday

**October: act for peace** Assists in Emergencies in Sri Lanka

- *Sunday, 18 October* – Stand Up Against Poverty!

**November: act for peace** Empowers Communities in East Timor

*Christmas Bowl dates:*

- *Sunday, 22 November* – Christ the King
- *Sunday, 29 November* – Advent 1

**December: act for peace** Helps to Build Peace in Sudan

*Christmas Bowl dates:*

- *Sunday, 6 December* – Advent 2
- *Sunday, 13 December* – Advent 3
- *Sunday, 20 December* – Advent 4
- *Friday, 25 December* – Christmas Day!
- *Sunday, 27 December* – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas

## Any Feedback or Queries about the 2008 Christmas Bowl?

Thank you for your wonderful support for the Christmas Bowl in its 60th year! If you have any queries, feedback or would like to share how your church got involved, please contact Edwyn Shiell, Marketing and Communication Coordinator, on free call **1800 025 101** or at [christmasbowl@ncca.org.au](mailto:christmasbowl@ncca.org.au).



## Spiritual Support for Bushfire Victims

The Victorian Council of Churches (VCC) is providing a Community Recovery Ministry service for victims of the Victoria bushfires. The VCC is committed to assisting communities in the process of recovery during this difficult time.

If you or someone you know have been affected by the Victoria bush fires and are looking for emotional or spiritual support, please contact Canon Graeme Winterton, the VCC Emergency Recovery State Coordinator, at [winterton@datafast.net.au](mailto:winterton@datafast.net.au) or 03 9650 4511.

## Feedback

We would like to extend an invitation for our supporters to contribute to our newsletter.

If you are interested in learning more about a particular topic, would like to share comments or want to unsubscribe, please contact Jordan Shank, Marketing & Communication Director, with your feedback at [jshank@ncca.org.au](mailto:jshank@ncca.org.au) or on 1800 025 101.