

Diocesan Office of Justice, Ecology & Peace

MEDIA RELEASE

Attorney General's Comments give cause for concern

If the comments by Christian Porter, new Attorney General, published in the *Australian* on 17 October are to be taken as the new Government's plan for dealing with Aboriginal people in the legal system, then as a State we ought be ashamed.

Br Shane Wood, of the Catholic Diocesan Office of Justice, Ecology & Peace is fearful of the consequences of a renewed hard-line approach enunciated by Mr Porter. 'We already have an incarceration rate of Aboriginal people that is far out of proportion with their percentage of the population. Mr Porter's intended approach will only make this situation worse. How long will it take our politicians to wake up to the fact that these people cross the line of legal behaviour because of factors unrelated to these behaviours? 'How long can the government ignore the submissions of the Law Reform Commission of WA and begin to deal with the underlying issues facing Aboriginal people and not just the symptoms?' Br Wood asked.

'Mr Porter seems to be intent on increasing our prison population, keeping the prisoners there for longer and doing little to decrease the rate of repeat offending. Increasing the use of mandatory sentencing, making order against anti-social behaviour and limiting the use of discounts for guilty pleas are all focused on making the government look tough on crime,' Br Wood commented.

Other aspects of Mr Porter's agenda included having children aged 16 and 17 appear in adult courts for 'serious or violent crimes', thus allowing them to be named. The plans also include the possibility of making orders to prevent the possibility of an offender engaging in the same behaviour in the future.

'This smacks of a *preventative strike* approach to policing. Here we have a politician who wants to be a follower rather than a leader. He wants to do what he thinks will be popular with some influential sections of the public rather than listening to independent advice, and trying to lead the State towards a better outcome for all, and especially a reduction in the Aboriginal prison population,' Br Wood concluded.

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