

Diocesan Office of Justice, Ecology & Peace

MEDIA RELEASE

John Howard's about face welcomed...with reservations

'Things that are said and promised in the heat of an election campaign can be taken with a grain of salt,' the Coordinator of the Office of Justice, Ecology & Peace, Br Shane Wood, said today. 'There is usually a great deal of posturing, attempts to score points from the opposition and win over those who would not normally be inclined to vote for your side of politics. In the case of the Coalition, there is wooing and there is also some attacking going on.'

'The Prime Minister wishes us to believe that he is now on the same road to Reconciliation as people like Pat Dodson. He wants to place on record his failures in this area which were brought about as a result of his past. We are all products of our past, but some of us refuse to be prisoners to it. That is a lame excuse.

'In his speech, the Prime Minister evidenced no change of heart in his attitude to an apology, recognition of prior ownership of land, customary law or the right to be consulted on significant issues that affect the lives of Indigenous peoples. In all of these areas, his actions speak far louder than his words and we have only to look at what has been done in the Northern Territory in recent months to know what this means in practice. It is difficult to take the Prime Minister seriously when he offers a toothless symbolic gesture on the one hand while sending in the troops on the other.

'We also have to endure attacks from people like Tony Abbot who would want the churches and others interested in social justice to keep silent whilst politicians get on with their agendas. He would want us to ignore the plight of low-paid workers, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, Aboriginal people and others on the margins of our society while government continues to boast of record economic growth and overflowing treasury coffers. Those who advocate for and work with the poor and disadvantaged are used to this sort of treatment from those in power. Some like Jesus and Oscar Romero lost their lives as a result. There is a long tradition of advocacy and welfare work in our churches and we are not going to be intimidated into silence by politicians of any persuasion.'

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CONTACT: Br Shane Wood

Ph 08 9192 1060

Fx 08 9192 2136