



**DIGNITY IN HUMANITY:
RECOGNISING CHRIST IN EVERY PERSON
A UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

Eleventh Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia

06.20.01 **Dignity in Humanity: Recognising Christ in Every Person, A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Human Rights**
to adopt the statement 'Dignity in Humanity' as amended by the Assembly (See Appendix D).

1. The Uniting Church in Australia believes that human beings are created in the image of God who is three persons in open, joyful interaction. The image of God that is reflected in human life, the form of life that corresponds to God, is the human community—all people—finding its life and sustenance in relationship.
2. Thus, the Uniting Church believes that every person is precious and entitled to live with dignity because they are God's children, and that each person's life and rights need to be protected or the human community (and its reflection of God) and all people are diminished.
3. In Jesus Christ we discern that which is truly human. As we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger and care for the thirsty, the sick and the imprisoned, there is the mysterious possibility that we will discover the life of Christ among us (Matthew 25:31-46), and share the love of God.
4. We believe that God has given humanity gifts and skills for the benefit of the earth and humanity itself. These gifts include the capacity for love, compassion, wisdom, generosity and moral choice. They come with the responsibility to ensure the health and wellbeing of present and future generations and the earth. The well-being of the earth is crucial to the possibility of human community and well-being. Social, political and economic arrangements should reflect the dignity and worth of human beings and respect for the planet. Through the prophets and the life and words of Jesus, God calls people to work for justice for the poor and vulnerable.
5. We believe that Christians are called to love their neighbour as they love themselves and to extend that love even to enemies. It is the love of God in Christ Jesus which motivates us to live out this calling by working for peace with justice in our church, our communities and the world. The recognition of human rights is an affirmation of the dignity of all people and essential for achieving peace with justice.
6. We affirm the inherent and inalienable right of all people to live free of persecution and violence, with access to all that is necessary for a decent life.

7. We remember the commitments made in our *Statement to the Nation*, at the Uniting Church's inception in 1977:

We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.

8. We reaffirm the *Statement on the Rights of Nature and of Future Generations* (1991) in which the Uniting Church National Assembly acknowledged "the inalienable dignity of all humans", and called for "the recognition and guarantee of human rights around the world".
9. We name the broken nature of the world. It is flawed and vulnerable to unjust structures and the practice of evil.
10. We confess that throughout its history the Church has perpetrated violence and abused human rights through action, inaction, complicity and collusion and that we have often used the Bible to justify such violence. We repent of our sin and commit ourselves to work for reconciliation and justice as we continue to understand our own brokenness.
11. We condemn the abuse of human rights and the failure to uphold and promote human rights as contrary to the gospel of God's love in Christ for all human beings and the earth.
12. We affirm our support for the human rights standards recognised by the United Nations (UN). Everyone has a birthright to all that is necessary for a decent life and to the hope of a peaceful future. This birthright is expressed in UN human rights instruments which describe human rights as civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. These instruments provide a valuable framework for assessing political, economic and social systems and are an important tool for peace.
13. We note that the internationally recognised human rights are indivisible, universal and inalienable:
- a. No rights are possible without all that is necessary for a decent life, including the rights to work with just pay and conditions, adequate food and health care, adequate, appropriate and accessible housing and a safe environment, education for the full development of the human potential and the right of people to participate fully in decision-making about their common future.¹ Civil and political rights cannot be separated from economic, social and cultural rights.
 - b. It is the duty of all States, regardless of their cultural, economic or political systems, to promote and protect human rights and "eliminate all violations of human rights and their causes, as well as obstacles to the enjoyment of these rights".²
 - c. It is "the right and duty of the international community to hold all state and non-state actors accountable for violations of human rights which occur in their jurisdiction or control, or for which they are directly responsible"³.
 - d. In the exercise of a person's rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the

1 *Together on the Way* 5.8 *A Statement on Human Rights*, World Council of Churches, Eighth Assembly, December 1998, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/assembly/hr-e.html>, para. 3.5

2 Vienna Declaration, World Conference on Human Rights, 25 June 1993, [http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/A.CONF.157.23.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/A.CONF.157.23.En?OpenDocument)

3 *Together on the Way*, WCC, para. 3.9

just requirements of human dignity and the general welfare of a democratic society.⁴

14. We support the commitment of the Eighth Assembly of World Council Churches to promote and defend human rights in a way which takes into account:
- a. “the values and insights into human rights and dignity derived from the rich heritage of peoples’ religions, cultures and traditions”;
 - b. “the rights of peoples, nations, communities and their cultures as well as the rights of each individual within them”;
 - c. “the equal rights of young and old, of women and men, and of all persons irrespective of their origin or condition”.⁵

15. We encourage all governments to fulfil their responsibilities as members of the United Nations, recognising it as the peak forum for discourse between nations, and upholding their commitment to the UN’s Charter and to UN treaties that serve the forging of peaceful and non-exploitative international relations. Peace is served by UN member States acting towards one another and the UN in good faith.

16. We heed the call of the World Council of Churches’ Central Committee in 1995, for all churches to:

be alert to the activities and policies of their respective governments with a view to strengthening the capacity of the UN in areas such as the promotion and protection of human rights, the struggle against racism, the enhancement of the rights of women, aid to and protection of refugees and migrants, the effective international control of production and transfer of armaments, the elimination of nuclear weapons, protection of the global environment, and the realization of a just and equitable international economic order.

17. We urge the Australian Government to fulfil its responsibilities under the human rights covenants, conventions and treaties that Australia has ratified or signed, by upholding international standards in effecting social and legislative change.

18. We pledge to assess current and future national public policy and practice against international human rights instruments, keeping in mind Christ’s call and example to work for justice for the oppressed and vulnerable.

19. We declare our opposition to capital punishment and commit ourselves to stand against the death penalty wherever it exists, regarding it as a cruel and inhuman punishment which denies the ability of an offender to reform.

20. We urge the Australian Government to develop and promote human rights education which, consistent with the recommendations of the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, includes peace, democracy, development and social justice, and aims to foster mutual understanding, healthy and harmonious communities, and justice and peace.

21. We commit the Uniting Church National Assembly to promote an increased awareness and understanding of human rights through our education, justice and mission programs

⁴ based on Article 29(b), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

⁵ Declaration of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1998, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/assembly/hudec-e.html>

and to stand in solidarity with our partner churches as they advocate and work for human rights in their countries.

22. We encourage all members, groups, congregations and agencies of the Uniting Church to model respect for human rights in their daily lives and to advocate for policies consistent with human rights standards and against violations of human rights in all forms, both within Australia and internationally.
23. We encourage the councils of the Uniting Church to model respect for human rights in their work and mission, including working towards an end to manifestations of greed, corruption, violence, persecution and exclusion.