



# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda addresses Australian bishops  
Media Release  
24 November, 2011**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda addressed the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference yesterday at their Plenary meeting.

Chair of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Bishop Christopher Prowse welcomed the Commissioner and affirmed that Commissioner Gooda presented an “agenda of hope.”

In his 30 minute presentation, Commissioner Gooda acknowledged that although there have been some mistakes by churches over the past 200 years, the Church has had a rich tradition of standing up for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and tackling the root causes of their disadvantage.

“I look to the Catholic bishops who said in 1972: it is as obvious as a tree on the Nullabor that Aborigines have land rights... ownership, employment, housing, education and bargaining power are also paramount rights.” (ACBC, 1972).

Commissioner Gooda spoke about the hope given by the national apology by the Parliament which acknowledged the past and committed to make steps toward a reconciled Australian future.

"It's a journey that, to steal the words of the Australian Catholic Bishops from 1972, moves us along the road 'to the human liberty and dignity which Australia owes her people'; It's a journey that is not about looking back. It's about looking forward and moving forward as a nation; It's a journey that can help build the healthy relationships necessary for an agenda of hope."

Commissioner Gooda advised the bishops that the most important thing that people can do for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is to go into the communities and listen to them, rather than imposing structures.

“Relationships are built on understanding, dialogue, tolerance, acceptance, respect, trust and reciprocated affection. Not intolerance, a lack of acceptance, a lack of dialogue, mistrust and a lack of respect and understanding”, he said.

This presentation was warmly received by the Australian bishops who followed with questions and comments on the situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their dioceses.

**Some images are available of the Social Justice Commissioner and some of the Australian bishops and can be obtained by emailing [media@catholic.org.au](mailto:media@catholic.org.au)**

**For media enquiries, please contact Beth Doherty on 0407 081 256**