

**INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS POLICY**  
**ACTU Congress September 1995**

**1. PREAMBLE**

- 1.1 Congress declares that all the peoples of the world have the right to self determination and the democratic election of their governments, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association in trade unions and the right to live in peace without fear of aggression or subversion by a foreign power, by military force or other means.
- 1.2 Congress recognises, however, that there are many obstacles to the realisation of these rights - including the arms race, the mass poverty of large sections of the world's population and the fact that many of the world's people are ruled by authoritarian governments, intolerant of their neighbours and their own people.
- 1.3 Congress affirms that trade unions have an important role to play in arresting and eventually eliminating the nuclear and conventional arms race, the alleviation of world poverty and the development of freer and more tolerant societies. Congress recognises that the achievement of these objectives are necessary foundations for creating a more peaceful world.
- 1.4 Congress calls on all governments to respect the legitimate aspirations of people to live with dignity and with full democratic rights and freedoms. In offering support and encouragement to initiatives which may contribute to the process of democratisation, Congress recognises that peace can only be a reality when all people enjoy basic dignity and democratic rights.

**2. PEACE AND DISARMAMENT**

- 2.1 Congress is deeply conscious of the massive economic burden which excessive arms expenditure places on the world's people, diverting resources away from the improvement of living standards throughout the world. Accordingly Congress reaffirms that 'peace is union business' and recommends that all affiliates play a positive part in all peace activities aimed at securing the implementation of ACTU Policy.
- 2.2 Further, Congress is aware that all the advances sought by trade unions in employment, housing and social welfare matters, are in constant jeopardy unless they can be achieved against the background of a stable and lasting peace.

2.3 Recognising that world peace and disarmament are the most pressing problems facing the world today, Congress calls upon ACTU affiliates to pursue with vigour the already considerable policies in that field which the ICFTU has formulated, and to press upon the world community the necessity to utilise the available resources for economic development to alleviate and eradicate poverty everywhere.

2.4 The ACTU

- (i) demands that the pursuit of peace should have priority over all political objectives;
- (ii) is firmly committed to the peaceful resolution of international conflicts;
- (iii) recognises the right of all the peoples of the world who are prepared to defend their freedom;
- (iv) condemns the reliance on nuclear weapons which pose a threat to all human life and the earth's environment;
- (v) condemns the enormous growth in the build-up of conventional weapons throughout the world;
- (vi) supports national trade union policies for the abandonment of nuclear weapons in accordance with ACTU policies; and
- (vii) demands effective national and international control of the arms trade.

2.5 Congress therefore declares that the initial and limited steps forward already made must be built upon and expanded so that we can move towards the ultimate goal of elimination of all nuclear weapons throughout the world. The first steps towards disarmament must not be allowed to dull demands for more rapid progress. The agreement between the super-powers must not become a pretext for inactivity.

Further, nor must we allow the progress to be used as an excuse by some governments to build up or introduce different categories of weapons or to move towards more offensive military strategies, including extension of the arms race into space and militarisation of the seas.

2.6 In pursuit of further progress the ACTU calls on the Federal Government to:

- (i) use all possible influence with nuclear weapons States, to bring about an end to the nuclear arms race and the elimination of nuclear weapons;
- (ii) encourage meaningful negotiations leading to multilateral and verifiable disarmament under international control;
- (iii) support the maintenance, strengthening and universal acceptance of the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons;
- (iv) work in the United Nations and all disarmament negotiating forums for the drawing up of a treaty to ban all nuclear testing by all States in all environments for all time;
- (v) seek universal agreement on an end to the production of fissionable materials for weapons purposes;

- (vi) work vigorously for the ratification of the treaty, outlaw production, storage and use of chemical and bacteriological weapons;
- (vii) argue for agreement on the creation and progressive enlargement of nuclear free zones;
- (viii) take initiatives in the United Nations and directly with other States designed to reduce sharply the arms trade whether overt, covert, or illegal; and
- (ix) support moves by the United Nations to bring about an overall reduction in military budgets and to divert such resources from military expenditure to developmental and other economically productive activities.

2.7 Congress also expresses concern at the continued French testing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific and reaffirms policy opposed to such tests.

### **3. EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND DISARMAMENT**

3.1 Congress, notes the decision of the UN Special Sessions on Disarmament 1978 and 1982 relating to the World Disarmament Campaign as follows:

"With a view to contributing to a greater understanding and awareness of the problems created by the armaments race and the need for disarmament, urges Governments, governmental and non-governmental international organisations to take steps to develop programs of education for disarmament at all levels".

3.2 Congress believes that:

- (i) Peace and Disarmament Education should:
  - (a) help students understand some of the complex processes leading to tension and conflict at individual, group, national and global levels, and be aware of some of the ways in which these conflicts may be resolved. Such approaches should foster a critical attitude to the issues of peace and war,
  - (b) encourage attitudes that lead to a preference for constructive and non-violent resolution of conflict, and,
  - (c) help students develop the personal and social attitudes and skills necessary to live in harmony with others and to behave in positive and caring ways;
- (ii) disarmament and the use of the world's resources for peaceful purposes cannot be omitted from Peace Education;
- (iii) the issues of human rights, social justice, equitable access to resources, and discrimination on grounds of race, age, gender, ability or belief cannot be separated from Peace and Disarmament Education;

- (iv) methods of teaching and learning about Peace and Disarmament issues and the environment in which they take place are as important as the content itself; and
- (v) the release of student initiative and creativeness is essential to combat the feeling of powerlessness.

#### **4. SUPPORT FOR THE UNITED NATIONS AND COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS**

- 4.1 Congress reaffirms its support to the United Nations and its agencies and to the ideals embodied in the United Nations Charter, and stresses the need to ensure the effectiveness of the United Nations as an organisation capable of assisting in the process of the attainment of world peace and justice, thus facilitating and fostering advancement to all member nations.
- 4.2 Congress acknowledges the role of the Commonwealth of Nations in furthering understanding between the peoples of those nations within its membership, and expresses the hope that the Commonwealth in so doing will positively advance the cause of world peace. Congress welcomes ACTU participation in the Commonwealth Trade Union Council.

#### **5. HUMAN AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS**

- 5.1 Congress recognises that the question of human rights is a legitimate international concern, transcending national boundaries, and rejects attempts to describe a concern for abuses of human rights as interference in the internal affairs of other States.
- 5.2 Congress pledges its support for the achievement of basic human rights, including:
  - (i) Freedom from want
  - (ii) The release of all non-violent political prisoners
  - (iii) The right of all workers to organise free trade unions
  - (iv) The right to free and democratic election by ballot
  - (v) Freedom of speech
  - (vi) Freedom of assembly
  - (vii) Freedom of religious worship
  - (viii) A free Press, and
  - (ix) Freedom to demonstrate and protest in a democratic fashion.
- 5.3 Implicit in the support for basic human rights is the outright rejection and abhorrence by Congress of any form of discrimination on the grounds of:
  - . race
  - . colour
  - . sex
  - . marital status
  - . sexual orientation
  - . age
  - . religion
  - . political opinion

- . national extraction, or
- . social origin.

- 5.4 Accordingly, the ACTU declares that the right to food, shelter, health care, economic security and education are fundamental pre-conditions to human survival and dignity, and that the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone can enjoy economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights.
- 5.5 The establishment and defence of these rights are essential to free societies and the achievement of peace.
- 5.6 Congress recognises, however, that the 'peace' of the vanquished or hopelessly oppressed is not true peace.
- 5.7 As a positive expression of the importance placed on human rights by the trade union movement, Congress actively supports the work of non government organisations involved with human rights, including Amnesty International, in efforts to identify political, including trade union prisoners and to campaign for their release.
- 5.8 Congress deplors violations of human rights whenever and wherever they occur, irrespective of the ideology of the government or society which perpetrates them, and shall not be selective in opposing such violations.
- 5.9 Congress also declares full support for campaigns designed to focus world attention on nations which persist with forms of repression against the development of free trade unionism and expresses its concern with the brutal terrorist attacks which have been made on free trade unionism from time to time.
- 5.10 Congress records its condemnation of those regimes responsible for the unwarranted imprisonment of tens of thousands of active trade unionists, and those others subjected to torture and to exile.
- 5.11 The ACTU acknowledges with deep sorrow news of the continuing death and disappearance of many of our colleagues of trade unionism within their own countries.
- 5.12 Congress expresses deep concern that elementary trade unionism is being denied and suppressed in many parts of the world, and that existence of indescribable poverty, represents an enormous barrier to the development of any form of trade unionism.
- 5.13 Congress determines that in support of the movement for free trade unionism, solidarity actions may be taken from time to time in support of workers in other countries.
- 5.14 In considering such action, Congress resolves that all trade union organisations and non-government solidarity organisations, and donor agencies should be careful not to support any trade union organisation that does not demonstrate by its conduct, that it accepts democratic values in its political and organisational relations.

## **6. SUPPRESSION OF UNIONISTS**

- 6.1 Congress noting the suppression of the trade union movement in different parts of the world, particularly in emerging nations, and recognising that Australia currently supplies economic and cultural aid to these sovereign nations, calls upon the Australian Government to consider

the cancellation of economic assistance to those Governments who do not observe ILO Conventions and who are taking illegitimate action against a properly constituted trade union movement. Further, Congress calls upon the Australian Government to continue to provide financial schemes of assistance to those nations so that a properly constituted and democratic union movement can develop; the ACTU to be involved in these schemes by providing personnel with the necessary trade union experience, to give adequate assistance.

## **7. INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION RELATIONS**

- 7.1 Congress reaffirms the need to continue its affiliation with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions as a demonstration of the Australian trade union movement's strong desire to promote, cultivate and strengthen the cause of international trade union solidarity, and as a means whereby our movement can legitimately participate and contribute in the international trade union areas.
- 7.2 The A.C.T.U. will work internationally and within the I.C.F.T.U. to end the historical divisions within the international trade union movement.
- 7.3 Congress also reaffirms the need to maintain affiliation to the Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation of the ICFTU and supports the work of the South Pacific and Oceanic Council of Trade Unions (SPOCTU)
- 7.4 Congress supports continuing affiliation to the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in recognition of the importance of the role of this Body, representing as it does the major industrialised countries of the world with which Australia has a close economic relationship.
- 7.5 Congress supports initiatives, to encourage democratic and independent trade unions in the Indian Ocean region, and to strengthen the participation of trade unions in issues related to Indian Ocean economic developments.
- 7.6 Further, believing that contacts between trade union organisations is desirable and necessary for better understanding between people of all countries, Congress endorses the principle of exchange visits between genuine representative trade union movements.
- 7.7 Congress being cognisant of the unique geographical and historical position of Australia and changing world circumstances believes it appropriate to undertake visits in connection with some trade union centres conceived as having some special significance in terms of the interests of this country.

## **8. DEVELOPMENT AID**

- 8.1 The ACTU believes that the elimination of poverty and its causes in developing nations is a humanitarian responsibility.
- 8.2 Congress is concerned at the fall in the percentage of GNP devoted by the Australian Government as aid to developing and under-developed countries. We call for the Federal Government to raise substantially the amount devoted to foreign aid within the life of the next Parliament, as Australia has a responsibility to provide an example to other developed countries by committing a greater proportion of our budget to aiding disadvantaged people.

- 8.3 In supporting the concept of overseas humanitarian aid programs, Congress affirms its strong belief that such programs should be based upon long term solutions rather than short term aid, and should include the principle of:
- (i) solidarity amongst workers
  - (ii) self help through training programs
  - (iii) self reliance and independence, and
  - (iv) direct involvement of Australian workers' skills
- 8.4 Further, Congress believes that Australia's developing and emergency assistance program should have a clearly identifiable component to assist workers in the Third World to acquire relevant trade, technical, managerial and professional skills.
- 8.5 The ACTU will seek the Federal Government's support for:
- (i) the provision of development assistance on flexible terms according to the level of need and the likelihood of aid reaching the poorest in recipient countries
  - (ii) a commitment to achieving the UN target of 0.7% of gross national product for official development assistance, with an eventual target of 1%, and
  - (iii) a continued financial commitment to the overseas aid program.

## **9. APHEDA**

- 9.1 Recognising the responsibilities of the Australian trade union movement and its members towards those countries and regions of the world where men and women workers are disadvantaged through such causes as poverty, under-development and civil disruption, Congress reaffirms its support for Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (A.P.H.E.D.A.) as the official overseas humanitarian aid arm of the A.C.T.U.
- 9.2 Congress commends the continuing valuable contribution that its official overseas humanitarian aid arm APHEDA, makes to Australia's overseas development program, particularly its special focus on education and training for workers (now numbering several thousands) their families and their organisations.
- 9.3 Congress recognises that economic growth without social justice leads to inequality, and so endorses APHEDA's work for the empowerment and self determination of those most marginalised - women, indigenous peoples, refugees, stateless people and the unemployed.
- 9.4 Congress reaffirms further, the need for this type of development work to continue, and calls upon affiliates to offer full support at all levels of their membership. In particular we draw to the attention of affiliates the opportunities for their increased membership participation through APHEDA's Skillslink program available to unions, workplaces and individual unionists.
- 9.5 Congress calls upon all ACTU branches and affiliates to co-operate fully in promoting the work of APHEDA, by membership at affiliate and individual levels, wide publicity, donations and direct involvement in specific overseas aid programs.
- 9.6 Congress recognises that assistance to the economies of Third World societies is a vital requirement for the creation of democratic societies. Democracies are more stable on a full

stomach than on an empty one. In relation to this issue the Federal Government should be careful to ensure that aid for butter is not converted into money for the purchase of guns, and that projects financed are closely monitored and supported to minimise the chances of corruption and to maximise the chances of success. Further, Congress believes that development assistance should be provided on flexible terms according to the level of need and the likelihood of aid reaching the poorest in recipient countries.

## **10. DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION**

10.1 Congress recognises the importance of increased community understanding about Australia's international role, especially in the areas of aid and development programs with nations of the Third World.

10.2 Development Education in formal and non-formal education systems, is a key instrument in this process. It provides informed analysis and understanding of the underlying causes of underdevelopment and poverty amongst nations and peoples of the world. It shows the links that exist between such questions as economic growth, human and worker rights, development, affluence, the arms race and global interdependence.

10.3 Congress believes that development education in the formal education system should seek to educate students/community about the people of developing countries, issues affecting them and the inter-relationships between the developing and developed worlds. It should be aimed at changing attitudes which perpetuate the imbalance of power and wealth that exists between and within countries by:

- (i) basing the course of study on the belief that the current distribution of wealth and power is unjust and needs to be changed;
- (ii) equipping people to understand the causes and consequences, social, political, economic and environmental of this imbalance;
- (iii) critically evaluating the role of aid in the developing world by examining case studies of:
  - (a) those projects which empower local communities, using local expertise and reinforcing local values,
  - (b) those projects which impose western expertise and values,
  - (c) provision of food aid, and
  - (d) child sponsorship programs;
- (iv) developing values in the students which lead them to work for a just and sustainable global economy;
- (v) recognising that effective change needs to occur through aid within social, political, cultural and economic areas of life in both our own and other societies;
- (vi) emphasising the rich cultural heritage and the dignity of the people of the developing world and investigating/highlighting the struggles for justice occurring in these countries; and

- (vii) using appropriate teaching strategies which emphasise co-operation rather than competition, groups not individuals and which result in student initiated and developed action.

## **11. REFUGEES**

- 11.1 Congress expresses deep concern at the global growth of the international refugee problem.
- 11.2 Congress believes that Australia, as a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees, and as a member of the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees Executive Committee, has a special responsibility towards refugees.
- 11.3 Congress accepts the general definition of refugees contained in the 1951 Convention (and later amended in the Protocol in 1967) as applying to any person who:
- "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group of political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."
- 11.4 Congress supports the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and commends the work of this U.N. agency in its provision of legal protection and assistance to refugees and for the assistance rendered in their repatriation or resettlement.

## **12. UNION DEVELOPMENT**

- 12.1 Congress believes that the trade unions of all countries can play a positive role in the promotion of peace and democracy.
- 12.2 The ACTU will:
- (i) Support the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) to which the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) is affiliated in its endeavours to foster the formation and development of free and independent trade unions.
  - (ii) Assist affiliates in their international activities by disseminating information on international developments and through seeking to co-ordinate activities of affiliates conducting international programs so as to avoid waste and unnecessary duplication.
  - (iii) Urge affiliated unions to provide advisory assistance and training in such areas as the development of co-operatives and other related socio-economic services for the trade unions in our region.
  - (iv) Encourage increased training of Asia Pacific unionists, including -attending specialist courses at the Clyde Cameron College.
  - (v) Continue discussions with the Federal Government concerning expanding the provision of funding for the development by the ACTU of projects of assistance to unions in South East Asia and the Pacific.
  - (vi) Support Amnesty International's request to world governments to release political prisoners, who are frequently imprisoned for trade union activity.

- (vii) Call on Australian trade union officials to raise in overseas visits, the plight of gaoled or missing unionists to the governments or trade union organisations which they meet.
- (viii) Demand that the Australian Government condemn human rights violations wherever they occur.
- (ix) Campaign to inform workers and the public at large of the policies of the ACTU and the trade union movement generally concerning the achievement of peace and disarmament.

### **13. EAST TIMOR**

- 13.1 Congress recognises the inalienable right of the East Timorese people to self determination and independence and condemns the Indonesian annexation of East Timor. Congress calls on the Australian Government to reverse its policy of recognising that annexation to cease the training of, and the supplying of arms to, the Indonesian military and security forces and to encourage Indonesia to implement a measure of self rule to East Timor.
- 13.2 Congress calls on the Australian Labor government to actively support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General to promote negotiations for a peaceful settlement in East Timor. It notes that such negotiations should include not only the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal but also representatives of the East Timorese people.
- 13.3 Congress expresses its continuing concern at reports of human rights violations in East Timor and urges the Australian Government to continue by all available means to seek the alleviation of these concerns.
- 13.4 Congress calls upon the Indonesian authorities to allow journalists, Amnesty International, aid organisations and other independent observers increased access to East Timor.

### **14. INDEPENDENCE FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS PEOPLES**

- 14.1 Congress supports the right to self determination and independence for all colonised and exploited Pacific Islands' peoples.
- 14.2 In particular, Congress supports the growing demand for independence from France for the people of New Caledonia, recognising the prior and rightful claims and interests of the Kanak people.
- 14.3 Without independence, the people of New Caledonia will continue to suffer at the hands of the multi-national and colonial forces who now control and exploit their natural resources, economic and cultural lives.

### **15. NUCLEAR FREE PACIFIC**

- 15.1 This Congress once again unreservedly condemns the nuclear testing and the dumping of nuclear waste in the Pacific. It moreover proclaims the rights of people and their trade unions through the democratic process to set such anti-nuclear policies as are in accord with the wishes of their peoples.

### **16. INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE**

- 16.1 Congress endorses the concept of the Indian Ocean being declared a Zone of Peace and supports trade union activity devoted towards achieving that objective.
- 16.2 Congress endorses the development of a network of strong and independent unions in the Indian Ocean Region.
- 16.3 Congress notes with concern recent initiatives in the Region which have seen the development of Consultative groups made up of business interests, academics and Government to promote economic growth which have excluded regional unions.
- 16.4 Congress seeks the development of a comprehensive strategy for union growth in the region by the Executive.
- 16.5 Congress calls on the Federal Government to support such a strategy.

**17. IRELAND**

- 17.1 Congress welcomes the Irish peace process and expresses its admiration for the continuing efforts of those trying to bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in Ireland.
- 17.2 Congress supports an immediate move towards all-party talks in Ireland in order to achieve a negotiated settlement to the conflict in that country.

**18. "CODE OF CONDUCT" ON AUSTRALIAN COMPANIES OVERSEAS AND A "SOCIAL CLAUSE" IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

- 18.1 Congress supports both Australian investment overseas and the expansion of trading relationships overseas which provide opportunities for improved living standards for Australian workers. Increased international opportunities, and Australia's integration into the Asia Pacific region, the fastest growing economic region in the world, is welcome.
- 18.2 Nonetheless, Congress believes Australia's involvement in international investment and trade brings both rights and responsibilities. Responsibilities apply to Australian companies which operate and invest overseas, and rights accrue to those workers they employ. Responsibilities also apply to Australian companies which import goods and services. Australian employers who meet internationally recognised labour standards in Australia should also do so when operating overseas. Congress supports a Code of Conduct for Australian companies operating overseas which identifies employment standards and practice necessary to comply with international conventions ratified by Australia.
- 18.3 Similarly, to ensure that the outcomes of international trade accrue to the workforce a social clause should be supported in International Trade Agreements, linking international trade to the issue of worker rights. A social clause would require countries to commit to minimum labour standards based on the following ILO Conventions:
  - (i) No. 87 & 98 - Freedom of Association, Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining;
  - (ii) No. 100 & 111 - Equity and Non-Discrimination
  - (iii) No. 29 & 105 - Forced Labour

(iv) No. 138 - Child Labour, and the Right to Work in a Safe Environment.

18.4 The enforcement of internationally recognised minimum labour standards ensures that international trade can be used to improve workers rights and living standards, rather than undercutting labour standards. An overall improvement in workers rights and labour standards as countries progress economically is the best means of avoiding a return to protectionist sentiments. Furthermore, Congress supports technical assistance to ensure that developing countries have the capacity to improve labour standards.

**INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**