

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

A FAIR TRADE IN CHRISTIAN GOODS

RATIONALE

The Christian gospel calls us to work for justice and equity in society, particularly as we care for those who live in poverty and are most vulnerable in the world.

Christians believe that the human person

- is created in the image of God and is intrinsically valuable;
- must be treated with respect;
- is not merely a resource; and
- is created for community, with God and with other people – Christ said ‘the greatest commandment is to love God, neighbour as self’ and ‘the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath’ (Mark 2:27).

The life and work of Christian communities and organisations is a response to the love of God; a response of gratitude and hope for a world which is intended to be guided by love and social justice. Christian communities and organisations are called to be a sign of the ‘new humanity’ God has brought into being through the life, death and resurrection of Christ; and therefore to live and act in ways which contribute to human well-being in all its dimensions.

It is as a result of these beliefs and commitments that Christian communities and organisations have been heavily involved in the Fair Trade movement which is supported by the World Council of Churches¹. Christian communities and organisations can support fair trade practices within their own jurisdictions through supporting fair trade initiatives in relation to the production and sale of Christian goods.

To encourage and enable churches to support fair trade as it relates to the production and trade of Christian Goods, the National Council of Churches in Australia affirms the statement “A Fair Trade in Christian Goods” and encourage its use alongside the “Christian Goods Standard”.

A FAIR TRADE IN CHRISTIAN GOODS

1. Statement of Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the “Christian Goods Standard” is to provide guidance to facilitate Christian goods sold in Australia to be produced or sourced from factories and suppliers that provide conditions for workers in accordance with a Christian understanding of the human person and creation.

1.2 The “Christian Goods Standard” sets out principles for Australian and multinational companies sourcing and/or producing Christian goods outside Australia for the Australian and international market. It is a guide for churches, Christian communities, Christian organisations, Christian consumers as well as companies in any way involved in the trade of Christian items. The Standard assists the understanding and utilisation of labour standards that conform to the Christian understanding of the human person and creation. Companies are strongly urged to

¹ World Council of Churches, 2004, *What does God require of us?: A declaration for just trade in the service of an economy of life*, [online], Accessed at: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/trade/01-04-just-trade-declaration.html> [12 August 2008]
World Council of Churches Public Issues Committee, 2006, *Vulnerable populations at risk: Statement on the responsibility to protect* [Document no. PIC 02-2 (adopted)], [online], accessed at: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/international-affairs/report-from-the-public-issues-committee/responsibility-to-protect.html> [12 August 2008]

support these ethical standards in the interests of upholding the dignity of the human person throughout their supply chains.

1.3 When work is made the highest priority in life, it can become a form of idolatry; in the end, this is counterproductive, harming everyone involved. Human labour is, at its best, participation in the work of God.

2 Scope

2.1 The “Christian Goods Standard” applies to:

- companies that may be a principal company, retailer, distributor, wholesaler, designer, licensee, importer or manufacturer or organiser of production; and
- Christian devotional items.

2.2 The “Christian Goods Standard” does not apply to books except for the Holy Bible.

2.3 Domestic labour laws apply to Australian and multinational companies sourcing and/or producing Christian goods within Australia.

3 Principles for the Production and Trade of Christian Goods

3.1 Christian communities and organisations should act as the conscience and inspiration for the broader community. Christians should be generous and willing to share. Christians should assist, wherever possible, the development and implementation of laws, regulation and administrative practice that contribute to the common good. If Christian communities are to be true to the spirit of the Gospel, they are obliged to engage in commercial dealings in a manner consistent with a Christian understanding of the human person and creation.

3.2 Those who produce Christian Goods must be provided conditions in accordance with a Christian understanding of the human person. God’s creation, and the wellbeing of people as part of creation, must be cherished.

3.3 Trade and employment arrangements must allow and promote a rhythm in people’s work lives that sustains and encourages a holistic life.

3.4 People need decent work that is freely chosen and benefits others; balanced by adequate rest and leisure. Workers must be able to freely enjoy family and community life and not suffer discrimination.

3.5 Due to their vulnerability, children, who enjoy special favour from God, must be provided with extra protection.

3.6 Recognition of the needs of people in relation to their health and safety in the workplace is essential to promote human dignity.

3.7 Workers must not be prevented from forming social justice communities that provide self-help, mutual protection and dignity in wages and work conditions.

3.8 Companies involved in the trade of Christian Goods must practice responsible corporate conduct.

APPENDIX 1

THE CHRISTIAN GOODS STANDARD

The purpose of the “Christian Goods Standard” is to provide guidance to facilitate Christian goods sold in Australia to be produced or sourced from factories and suppliers that provide conditions for workers in accordance with a Christian understanding of the human person and creation.

The “Christian Goods Standard” sets out principles for Australian and multinational companies sourcing and/or producing Christian goods outside Australia for the Australian and international market. It is a guide for churches, Christian communities, Christian organisations, Christian consumers as well as companies in any way involved in the trade of Christian items. The Standard assists the understanding and utilisation of labour standards that conform to the Christian understanding of the human person and creation. Companies are strongly urged to support these ethical standards in the interests of upholding the dignity of the human person throughout their supply chains.

The “Christian Goods Standard” aims to provide clear guidelines to companies to take incremental steps towards ethical supply chain management; as well as inform Christian communities and organisations so that they can hold companies to these commitments.

Responsible companies will commit to and implement all of the standards and norms contained in the “Christian Goods Standard” throughout their supply chain, and commit to transparency in their supply chain so that the local and international Christian community can verify that these standards and norms are being adhered to.

Responsible corporate conduct

Companies must provide transparency, accountability and disclosure on their ethical supply chain practice:

- Companies will trace and map the whole supply chain from the principal company; to include all subcontractors, suppliers, licensing agents, trading houses and workers including homeworkers.
- Companies will allow independent monitoring of all production bases and factories that source to the company and ensure that all stakeholders are consulted, represented and reported to in regard to factory locations and conditions.

Child labour

- The employment or engagement in work of children under 16 years is prohibited.
- 16-17 year olds must only engage light work which is not likely to be harmful.
- Employing children and young workers during school hours is prohibited.
- Work that is likely to jeopardise the development, health, safety or morals of young workers under the age of 18 years is prohibited.
- Consistent with this section on child labour, companies must support schooling for workers who are between the ages of 16 and 18 who have not yet completed compulsory education.
- Combined hours of transportation and work time for young workers under the age of 18 years must not exceed those prescribed under laws and regulation in the countries in which companies operate.
- Appropriate transitional economic assistance and educational opportunities shall be provided to any replaced child workers.

Discrimination

- All human beings, irrespective of race, colour, disability, family responsibility, gender, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity.
- Any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of distinguishing characteristics such as race, colour, disability, family responsibility, gender, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation is prohibited.

- Companies must provide for equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.
- No worker shall be subject to discrimination or coercion which would impair his or her freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his or her choice.
- Workers shall have the freedom to practice their religion subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Creation, health and safety

- Companies must, within the framework of laws and regulation and administrative practices in the countries in which they operate, and in consideration of relevant international agreements, principles, objectives, and standards, take due account of the need to protect and respect creation, worker and public health and safety, and generally to conduct their activities in a manner contributing to the wider goal of sustainable social and environmental development.
- Companies must provide safe and hygienic working environments, and best possible occupational health and safety practice to ensure the mental and physical health of workers, shall be promoted, bearing in mind the prevailing knowledge of the industry and of any specific hazards.
- Companies must provide adequate education and training to employees in health and safety matters, including their own health and safety and that of others in the workplace.
- Companies must promote worker involvement in improvement of health and safety practices.
- Workers must not be penalised for making a complaint or suggestion about health and safety.

Forced, compulsory labour and unjust contracts

- Slavery and forced labour, defined as all work or services which is involuntarily exacted from any person under menace or penalty, is prohibited.
- All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour are prohibited.
- Methods of payment which deprive the worker of a genuine possibility of terminating his or her employment are prohibited.
- Use of labour-only contracting, sub-contracting, or homeworking arrangements, trial periods without pay, apprenticeship schemes or fixed-term contracts of employment as means of avoiding company obligations to workers under applicable laws and regulations pertaining to labour and social security legislation are prohibited.

Freedom of association

- Workers and employers shall have the right to establish, and join employer or worker organisations of their own choosing.
- Employers must adopt a positive approach towards activities of workers' organisations and an open and supportive attitude towards organisational activities of workers, including collective bargaining.
- Workers organisations must be freely provided accessible facilities and information to assist their representative activities.
- With notice, union organisers must be allowed free access to workers.
- Harassment, intimidation or retaliation against employees for efforts to freely collectively bargain is prohibited.
- Dismissal, discrimination, harassment, intimidation or retaliation for reason of worker organisation membership or participation in worker organisation activities is prohibited.

Hours of Work²

- Ordinary hours of work must not exceed 48 hours per week.
- Overtime must be reasonable and purely voluntary, and not exceed 12 hours per week.
- All workers, including hourly and/or quota-based wage workers, must receive at least one day of rest in every seven.
- All workers, including hourly and/or quota-based wage workers, shall be compensated for overtime hours according to national or local law or be paid at least at the rate of time and a half, whichever the greater.

² These conditions are *much less than ideal*, but are written to respond to the poor conditions of factory work in developing nations

Respect for working people

- Physical abuse, threats of physical abuse, unusual punishments or discipline, sexual and other harassment, criminal assault and intimidation by the employer is strictly prohibited.

Wages

- Payment of a 'living wage'³ must occur.
- Wages and benefits must be in compliance with local and national laws.
- Where the legal minimum wage does not meet living expenses, the employer must provide adequate compensation to meet the essential needs of the workers.
- Illegal or unauthorised deductions from wages, or deductions as a disciplinary measure, are prohibited.
- Wages must be paid regularly, and on time.

³ A living wage meets the normal needs of an average employee who, as a human person in a civilised society, should be provided with the means to support a family in frugal comfort – see Australian *Harvester Decision*, 1907

APPENDIX 2

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

God, the Holy Trinity, created the world out of love and is sustaining and redeeming it towards a new creation. This Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are equal in deity and united in an intimate communion of love. Christians seek to image such a relationship in their lives, with the acknowledgement that it is a vision which only God can fully bring about – it is a future hope, not to be fully identified with any present political, social or economic arrangements. Nevertheless, God requires humankind to work with God towards that end, by letting that vision shape the way we live now as individuals, as local communities and as a nation. This responsibility extends to the way people live and conduct themselves in relation to trade and employment.

The Old Testament

The Holy Bible, which features many passages related to poverty and social justice (as well as those relating to idolatry) guides the Christian community in its understanding of work and trade. God the Creator, fashions people in His own image and likeness and invites people to work the soil - and asks them to cultivate and care for creation (Genesis 2:5-6 and 2:15). Work is part of this original human state; it precedes the fall, and only becomes a punishment or curse of toil and pain because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:6-8).

Work can be the source of the conditions of decent life, and can be, in principle, an effective instrument against poverty (Proverbs 10:4). The demand of Biblical justice precedes concern for profit (Proverbs 15:16; Proverbs 16:8). The Bible speaks against those who make profit through the exploitation of workers; God is “against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan” (Malachi 3:5).

The New Testament

In the Gospel of Luke (1:53), Mary, the mother (*Theotokos*) of Christ Jesus, states that God fills the hungry with good things.

Christ reminds us of the importance of rest outlined in Genesis. Christ believed that the meaning of the Sabbath (a weekly day of rest) had been lost due to mere surface observance (of the rules relating to it) – rather than adherence to the real reason behind it, which is based on the needs of the human person (Mark 2:27). Christ healed people on the Sabbath day to illustrate that this is the day of God, and that it is the day where people can dedicate themselves to God and others (Luke 6:6-11; Luke 13:10-17; Luke 14:1-6).

The Biblical mandate to act

The Letter of James defends the rights of workers to a just wage (James 5:4). The prophet Isaiah outlines harsh judgement for those who make unjust laws (Isaiah 10:1-4). The Apostle Paul states that Christians have a right to command all those who are wealthy to be generous with their wealth (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Reminders from history

There are some powerful reminders of social teaching from many periods in the history of Christianity. A saying from the Desert Fathers (early Christian monks - 300AD) states, “I never wanted work to be useful to me while causing loss to my brother, for I have this hope that what helps my brother will bring fruit to me...” In the early history of Christianity, seminal writers exhorted the faithful to treat the slaves of their day with high respect. In the 18th Century Christians in Britain and France led the movement for the abolition of slavery. In the 19th Century, Pope Leo XIII (in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*) condemned unjust and forceful workplace practices perpetrated by unscrupulous employers or contractors. Today, many Christians are involved in assisting vulnerable Australian workers, in such industries as cleaning and clothing, to be afforded their basic legal entitlements. Christian communities also celebrated the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British slave trade in 2007.