



MPs and Senators committed to continue to work toward the eradication of poverty during Voices For Justice 2011.

September 17-20, 2011 marked the sixth annual Voices for Justice gathering of Micah Challenge supporters in Canberra. Over four days, participants were inspired and equipped for advocacy for and with the world's poorest people through teaching, workshops and training. Participants continued their consistent call to our political leaders to ensure Australia meets its commitments to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Micah Challenge would like to thank all Members and Senators who supported Voices for Justice in 2011 by participating in events, speaking up in Parliament and helping with event arrangements.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

230 Australians of all ages, from all parts of the country and all walks of life, joined together in Canberra for Voices for Justice. The first two days of the gathering were spent educating and equipping ourselves to be part of the solution to poverty.

We were privileged to have two special international guests with us who work in contexts where there is extreme poverty:

"Like a little raindrop, I joined Christians from across Australia, descending upon Canberra in a deluge of justice, overflowing with love for the world's poorest people. The pitter-patter of these raindrops was a gentle but persistent sound our politicians could not ignore..."

Phil Chan, Voices for Justice Participant, 2011

Dr Jayakumar Christian, Director of World Vision India, highlighted the reality of poverty for us as well as giving insightful teaching from the Bible (below).

Kuhn Poo served as our guest chef. Kuhn Poo runs a Thai Cooking School for tourists in the Klong Toey slum of Bangkok and has written a popular cookbook titled 'Cooking with Poo'. She uses the profits from her business to help others in her community develop sustainable businesses and alleviate poverty. It was a privilege to hear her story and enjoy her hospitality (photo overleaf).

There was also a series of excellent workshops on good development, faith and action, campaigning skills and policy issues.





Kuhn Poo gives a dynamic cooking demo.

GIVING POVERTY THE FLUSH – FOCUS ON SANITATION

MPs and Senators joined hundreds of Micah Challenge supporters early on Tuesday morning 20th September, for breakfast and to form Canberra's longest toilet queue behind a giant toilet. The event was designed to raise awareness for the 2.6 billion people around the world who still have no access to a clean hygienic toilet (photo below).

In 2011, Micah Challenge added water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) to their existing focus on child and maternal health. These areas continue to be amongst the MDGs that are furthest off track, so they need to be high on the list of priorities for our government in the fight to end extreme poverty.

As part of the breakfast event, Micah Challenge launched its new WASHing Away Poverty report, which highlights the links between WaSH and health. A key concern for Micah Challenge is the effectiveness of spending on aid. The report highlights that spending on WaSH is potentially the most cost effective public health intervention, and achievement of the MDG7 targets concerning WaSH could save the lives of 2 million children each year.

Australia's estimated fair share contribution to WaSH globally is \$500 million. While Australia's investment in this area is forecast to increase over coming years, it will still fall well short of the required \$500 million. More action is needed. It is also vital that at least 50% of that funding be directed to sanitation, which is currently underfunded. On current rates of progress, the MDG target for sanitation will not be achieved until 2037.

The Hon Richard Marles, MP and Mr Scott Morrison, MP addressed participants. Both highlighted the vital importance of sanitation and the commitment of their parties to continue to work toward the eradication of poverty (photo front page).

"Poverty is about Pain. If you don't feel the pain, then you never really understand poverty"
"Statistics never bleed. It is people who bleed"

Dr. Jayakumar Christian, Director, World Vision India



Hundreds queue to form Canberra's longest toilet queue behind a giant toilet.

“The links between access to decent sanitation and global deaths are clear – particularly in children under five. Approximately 25% of the 8.1 million annual child deaths could be prevented by WaSH interventions. That’s 2 million kids who could be saved each year.”

Micah Challenge National Coordinator, John Beckett

POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS

Voices for Justice participants presented toiletry packs to more than 100 MPs and Senators in face to face meetings over two days. Included in each pack was a copy of the WASHing Away Poverty report, a poster for the back of the toilet door and a roll of printed toilet paper – a novel way of reminding us of the enormity of the issue every time we take our own toilets for granted (photo below).



Each MP also received a bundle of letters from local constituents asking the Treasurer for a timetabled commitment to reaching the internationally agreed aid target of 0.7% GNI. While Micah Challenge are thankful for the commitment from all parties to reach 0.5% GNI going to aid by 2015, we also highlight that this figure will only bring us into line with the average international effort. We continue to call on the government to make a timetabled commitment to 0.7% GNI.

Participants also used the meetings to highlight the fact that the poorest communities in the world are suffering the most from a changing climate. While debate continues over the carbon tax, these people can be easily forgotten.

Kateia Kaikai (pictured below) from Kiribati, shared her personal story with MPs and Senators. With most of Kiribati less than 3m above sea level, even marginal increases in sea level will be disastrous. *“Increased sea water intrusion from rising sea levels has limited our supply of fresh water, which has meant crop failures and very bad consequences for health...this is in the short term, but in the long term, we may lose all of our land underwater and be forced to leave our home,”* says Kateia.



Kateia Kaikai (left) meets the Hon. Greg Combet, MP

“Australia continues to refer to the internationally agreed aid target of 0.7% GNI as an ‘aspirational goal’. The targets outlined in this report represent no more than the promises we have made as a nation. These targets are achievable. It is time to turn so-called aspiration into action.”

The World We Want to See Report

POST VOICES FOR JUSTICE – THE CHALLENGE CONTINUES

Already there have been a number of speeches in both houses of Parliament in support of the campaign and highlighting the importance of sanitation. We look forward to seeing many more from MPs and Senators who committed to making this issue a priority.

The giant toilet struck a chord with national media, with every major television network profiling the story, most national print media providers profiling it online or in print, and many national and local radio stations running interviews. In conjunction with this national coverage, participants from Voices for Justice have profiled their involvement in Voices for Justice, along with the issues of poverty and sanitation, in many of their local papers.

Micah Challenge supporters have been equipped and inspired and continue to advocate for justice for the world's poorest people by running events and actions in their own communities.



Mr. Rob Oakeshott, MP takes a seat to raise awareness about a very serious issue

"Lack of access to a toilet is not only enormously dehumanising, it's literally a matter of life and death. No one in our world should be 'dying for a dunny'."

Micah Challenge National Coordinator, John Beckett

Micah Challenge is a global campaign to mobilise Christians to speak out against poverty and injustice, in support of the MDGs to halve global poverty by 2015. Churches from a wide range of denominations, schools, faith and community groups, and individuals, as well as a coalition of more than thirty aid and development agencies support the campaign. More than 114,000 Christians in Australia have signed the Micah Call in support of the campaign.

For more information about Micah Challenge, see www.micahchallenge.org.au

Micah Challenge →
HALVE POVERTY BY 2015