



CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NEW SOUTH WALES CLRI (NSW)

ABN: 52 476 362 010
Member of Catholic Church Religious Group

Mr. K Rudd
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

30th May 2009.

Dear Mr Rudd

I am writing on behalf of the Social Justice Committee of the Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW. While based in NSW, many of our Institutes have members working in Pacific Island countries, and they echo the concerns of the people of the Pacific with whom they work, regarding the proposed PACER trade agreement currently being proposed by Australia and New Zealand for our region.

Recently some of our members had the opportunity to meet with representatives of civil society from smaller island nations of the Pacific, representatives coming from community groups, Trade Unions and the Pacific Council of Churches. These representatives expressed strong concerns regarding the discussions that Australia and New Zealand hopes to initiate at the Pacific Forum in August on the proposed Pacific Trade Agreement (PACER). They have strong concerns regarding the effect such an agreement could have in their countries, and see the need for more preparation before such negotiations begin.

Their countries are:

- Small, remote and subject to natural disasters such as cyclones, floods etc.
- Have high transport costs.
- Lack investment.
- Have limited manufacturing capacity.
- Rely on relatively fragile agriculture, forestry and fisheries to provide income for trade.
- Have unresolved issues around land ownership.
- Have a model of development very different from that being "dictated" by Australia and New Zealand.
- Have very few trained and qualified people who can negotiate a fair outcome for their countries with the well resourced delegations from Australia and New Zealand.

They provided compelling arguments that the proposed agreement would adversely affect their countries and the peoples of the Pacific in many ways:

- Threaten manufacturing jobs.
- Slash Government revenue.
- Undermine the provision of essential services in their countries.

In the light of the above, and especially with the current exclusion of Fiji from the Pacific Forum, we join with the peoples of the Pacific Islands in their calls to have the negotiations around PACER removed from discussion in August, and delayed until the Pacific Island countries are in a better position to negotiate a trade agreement from an more equal position to their larger neighbours who could well benefit most from the proposed agreement.

Yours faithfully

Br P S Cram

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