Response to questionnaire of Australian Student Christian Movement

1. What is your vision for how government can best benefit the poor?

Maximizing employment priorities in all industries is paramount to achieving a significant reduction in poverty. Ease of access to educational and training opportunities is also essential.

Above all, it is important that the disadvantaged be given the necessary incentives to look for work and not to become complacent and fall prey to a "welfare" mentality. This means that social security payments and taxation arrangements must be structured in such a way as to encourage the unemployed to take up work when being offered a position whilst at the same time maintaining support through a reasonable and non punitive level of welfare payments until self-sufficiency is attained

2. How do you intend to address global poverty? Will you be increasing Australia's aid budget to at least 0.7% of GDP?

The Christian Democratic Party ("CDP") supports an increase in foreign aid. Already in September 2005, CDP NSW Upper House member, Dr Gordon Moyes, issued a media release (Aid Increase a Step in the Right Direction) acknowledging that "we have a long way to go before we are pulling our weight amongst our developed peers."

Australia's overseas aid contributions is expected to reach 0.36% of GNI by 2010, which is well short of the millennium development goals of 0.50% of GNI by 2010 and of 0.70% by 2015. CDP supports increasing overseas aid to match at least the Millenium development goals targets.

With regard to Third World Countries who are unable to repay their country's debt without creating more hardship for themselves, CDP supports Australia writing off the entire debt as part of its contribution to overseas aid to these countries.

3. How do you propose to support humanitarian entrants to Australia, including those who arrive informally to seek asylum?

Australia should continue to be a world leader in being a generous haven for genuine refugees through internationally supervised and orderly refugee resettlement programs.

CDP considers that Australia should continue to meet its international obligations to treat unauthorised arrivals humanely and expediently consider any claims they make for refugee status.

Persons who arrive illegally and make claims for protection that are proven false should be removed from Australia as soon as practicable. Mandatory detention should continue for all persons without authority to be in Australia, although provisions for supervised release into the community for families with children should be considered.

Priority should be given to refugee applicants who are most likely to readily integrate into the Australian way of life, including those who are being persecuted for their Christian faith.

4. How do you intend to address the crisis in accommodation for homeless and low-income Australians?

A family home is more than a mere asset. It is central to the life of the family and the raising of children.

CDP believes that, in the first instance, the best government housing policy is one which encourages and does not obstruct people providing for their own basic housing needs.

Therefore, as with the provision of basic food, all levels of government are obliged not to burden basic housing with unjust taxes and regulations.

Consequently, CDP asserts that the most efficient way to assist home ownership would be through the abolition of stamp duty and all other taxes on housing. As these taxes are levied by the states, CDP would support moves by the Cwth Government to insist on redistributing GST to the states only if all taxes on land and housing are removed.

CDP supports making home loan interest payments tax deductible up to a determined level of interest payment for means tested threshold household income levels.

CDP supports reducing the demand for residential land in capital cities by encouraging decentralization of populations to regional centres through taxation and other government incentives to industry, small business and home buyers.

CDP supports direct taxpayer funded housing for people who are genuinely unable, not merely reluctant, to provide for their own housing needs

Finally, CDP also supports stronger land tenure rights for the owners and tenants of land to prevent arbitrary damage being done to their rights by any level of government and a just compensation scheme for government caused damage.

5. What is your national anti-poverty strategy?

The government should develop a comprehensive strategy based on the creation of employment opportunities, education and training, teaching the value of work as a tool to gaining self-respect and fostering the desire to support the local community through one's individual gifts and talents.

6. How will you ensure that low-income earners are supported through the tax and welfare system? Will you be introducing a less punitive welfare system?

CDP supports a taxation system which would satisfy the following objective:

- create an adequate tax base to ensure that the burden of taxation does not fall disproportionately on lower and middle income earners;

CDP supports a rise in the zero rate tax free threshold so that no one pays tax until they have at least earned their own subsistence.

CDP supports a return to the indexation of tax brackets to stop governments' profiting from 'bracket creep'.

CDP supports income splitting for household members related by blood or marriage.

CDP supports deductibility on interest accrued on owner occupied housing. CDP believes that this tax deduction for owner occupied housing should be capped to ensure that the benefit remains with the low or medium income earner.

CDP continues to support retention of capital gain tax exemption on all owner occupied housing.

CDP supports the payment of a home maker allowance for families with young children to prevent both parents having to join the workforce and leaving the care of children to third party carers in their absence.

Goods and Services Tax.
CDP acknowledges that GST is a regressive tax in the sense that the rate of GST is the same for all taxpayers irrespective of their capacity to pay. The CDP does not support increasing it beyond the current level of 10%.

CDP supports the continued exemption of GST on a basket of essential expenditure items (e.g. basic foodstuffs, housing rent) as these items take up much of the income of a low income earner.

CDP supports the removal of GST on the Federal Fuel Excise component of the cost of fuel.

CDP supports the absence of GST on any compulsory state and federal levies

Abolition of Taxes
To the extent that GST revenue is distributed to the States, CDP affirms that all State taxes should be abolished.

Welfare
CDP supports a welfare payment structure that does not discourage the search of employment opportunities and does not financially penalize deserving welfare recipients who have obtained some part time or modest employment.

7. How does your industrial relations policy protect the powerless, support family life and ensure adequate income for all ?

It is important that business enterprises be allowed to prosper to provide maximum employment opportunities to all. At the same time, mechanisms must be put in place to protect vulnerable and low-paid workers. The priority of government should be to establish an industrial relations framework that ensures that unions are truly democratic institutions and representative of the workers'interests. There should be no room for bullying and intimidation of workers by union officials. At the same time, unscrupulous employers should be prevented from acting unjustly. The major problem with Australian industrial relations is that a culture of "them v us" has been fostered for many years; more cooperation between management and workers should be encouraged to avoid conflict wherever possible.

The CDP policy on industrial relations recognises the importance of securing flexible working arrangements for workers who have family commitments or part time employment. The traditional award system is not the best method of achieving the flexibility required in 21st century Australia. Some changes in workplace laws have been introduced with a view to introducing more flexibility in working hours, shifts etc. This is a step in the right direction. Yet, the concept of an Australian Fair Pay Commission performing a wage-setting function and providing a safety net for the

low paid must be retained. Current unfair dismissal laws need to be reviewed to ensure that more specific criteria be defined. In this regard, the CDP policy states that:

- the exemption threshold for unfair dismissals should be reviewed to ensure that only genuinely small businesses may benefit from the protection of these laws;

- the legislation should set out some criteria to assist with the interpretation of what is a fair dismissal. Such criteria could require consideration to be given to the employee's effort to date, the resources deployed by the employer to support the employee and the representations made by the employee as to his capacity to work at a set standard;

- more objective guidelines should be made to apply to dismissals by larger businesses on the grounds of "operational reasons, economic, technological and structural matters.".

CDP believes that Australian workplaces should become more responsive to the needs of families and recommends the following measures be adopted as soon as possible:

- Flexible arrangements regarding working hours (starting and finishing times) to assist parents who need to bring or collect children from schools;
- paternal and maternity leave;
- government subsidized work place crèches;
- no work on Sundays;
- workplace family counselors and chaplains;
- educational campaigns to make businesses more aware that better, more efficient workers are found in happier families and,
- government provision assistance and information to develop more family friendly work environments.

8. What policies do you have to support the development of indigenous Australians including closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians' health and well-being?

It is important to develop a culture of self-respect and self-management among indigenous Australians. The passive welfare mentality to which these communities have been subjected for years has been very damaging for them.

Proper justice for indigenous Australians can only be administered once the damage created by alcohol and drugs is recognized and positive solutions are offered to these communities. Education is paramount as a first step.

Idleness contributes also significantly to the abuse engendered by drugs and alcohol.
More training opportunities should therefore be extended to indigenous Australians.

Teaching a responsible lifestyle to many individuals in these communities is critical and stricter controls should be provided to prevent tax payer funds being misused in purchasing large quantities of alcohol and drugs to the detriment of food and shelter.

The distribution of pornographic material (video and magazines) should be banned as such explicit imagery only contributes to the spread of paedophilia and rape in these communities.

We must also acknowledge that a spiritual war is being waged in these communities; we must put the past behind us, forgive each other for the hostility created, and press on constructively for a positive future.

Finally, indigenous Australians need to understand they can be part of the democratic process and that they can improve their own living conditions through political lobbying as well as by running for parliamentary office.

9. What is your party's policy response to student poverty and high levels of debt?

The HECS system should continue and be evaluated regularly to improve its fairness and effectiveness. The government should consider giving more support to meeting the basic living requirements of deserving students through easier access to bursaries and scholarships. The government should provide the business sector with significant incentives to offer scholarships. Student welfare payments through Centrelink should be reviewed to ensure that poor but deserving students are not forced to obtain paid employment distracting them from the necessary focus on their important studies.

10. How will you ensure universal access to high-quality education and health care?

Education

Governments need to maintain a fair and equitable funding system between private and public schools. An independent evaluation review of the current funding system is needed to answer current criticisms on the allocation of funding to schools.

CDP is committed to the improvement of indigenous educational outcomes and will press for substantial improvement in the educational achievement of indigenous Australians including the need for academic scholarships for Aboriginal and low socio-economic families. Governments should invest in the research and development of effective educational partnerships between home, school and community as one of the national priorities in education.

Expanding the number of training opportunities for young people and the provision of additional funding for new apprenticeships and work programs are important objectives for CDP.

Extra support and remuneration should be given to teachers and administrators in rural areas and in districts where teaching conditions are more challenging.

Health care

Christianity holds that Humans, above every other creatures, enjoy God-given rights that no other authority can legitimately remove. Hence the care for the sick, infirm and weak and the respect for all Humans from conception to natural death is one of the central attributes of Christianity.

Christian tradition also holds those who practice medicine with special regard and responsibility because of their close relationship with human life and death

CDP affirms that all Australians, irrespective of their income or location, should have access to essential health services. However the ever increasing cost of health services to the public purse requires that individuals do what they reasonably can to care for and maintain their own

health. The CDP supports the introduction of government /industry education campaigns to promote healthy diets and lifestyles

CDP supports government assistance to cover essential dental expenses for means tested patients and a large scale public campaign to promote oral hygiene.

CDP believes that the under-resourcing of our hospitals must be urgently addressed through the following measures:

- provision for additional student places at medical and nursing schools including full fee paying student places;
- attractive scholarships available to medical and nursing students;
- immigration policies that favour well qualified medical practitioners and nurses from other English-speaking countries;
- the construction of new government metropolitan and regional hospitals
- incentives and support to Christian denominations with a demonstrated capacity in the provision of health services to renovate and build new not-for-profit metropolitan and regional hospitals

11. What is your plan to reduce Australia's negative environmental impacts?

The CDP believes that environmental issues are important because the environment is God-given and sustains life. We have an obligation to responsibly manage the environment and to mitigate, where feasible, environmental change and pollution. However, it needs to be remembered that the earth was made for humankind. The environment needs to be kept in perspective as the servant to humankind and not elevated to the point where human lives are sacrificed in favour of preserving the life of some plants or animals

CDP:

1. Accepts that the scientific debate around climate change is unresolved and in that sense the CDP remains agnostic in respect to scientific elements of the climate change debate.

2. Will not commit itself to any course of action that is certain to damage economic prosperity if the hoped-for benefits to the environment are uncertain or disproportionately costly.

3. Does not support carbon trading schemes as they are considered futile and create an unnecessary burden on our economy.

4. Does not support Australia being a signatory to the Kyoto protocol.

5. Encourages the development of economic alternatives to fossil fuels and cleaner coal mining technologies.

6. Wants to see a more balanced media treatment of the debate and issues surrounding climate change in school curriculum and the media.

7. Supports a forestry policy that balances sustainable environmental practices with the interests and long term viability of rural and regional forestry communities.

8. The implementation of viable programs to deal with salt damage to agricultural land.

12. What is your position regarding the loss of civil rights brought about by recent anti-terrorism legislation?

Civil rights must be upheld provided they do not interfere with the overall peace and security of all Australians. Although the individual person must be given adequate

opportunity to defend himself and not be detained without sufficient evidence, it is important that we keep the “balancing act” right and that we do not dilute our security and anti-terrorism policies to the point where we endanger the lives of our own people. The tension between civil rights and overall protection of our society cannot be resolved with simplistic solutions.

13. How do you intend to work for peace, especially in Iraq and in our region?

Whilst conflict should be resolved peaceably wherever possible, and where not, the conditions for a just war must be met before war is declared, the provision of an adequate defence force is of prime importance to any nation's government

Since ancient times it has been considered that one of the best justifications for the very existence of the nation state and its government is the physical protection of that nation's citizens and assets from foreign attack.

CDP supports the current level of ADF deployment in Iraq with the objective of training Iraqi security forces under the command of a democratically elected Iraqi Government with a view to stabilizing the country and then the eventual withdrawal of the ADF in consultation with our allies and the Iraqi Government.

CDP believes that peace in Iraq can only be achieved once the Iraqi security forces have the capability to provide a secure and peaceful environment to their fellow countrymen. CDP believes that Australia has a role to play in bringing this outcome in Iraq.

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Authorised by Gerard Goiran, Christian Democratic Party, 294 Great Eastern Hwy, Midland