

MEDIA PEACE PRIZE 1981

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE, 20 OCTOBER 1981

THE AUSTRALIAN MEDIA PEACE PRIZE 1981

The Hon. Mr. Justice M.D. Kirby

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My task is to 'define' the Media Peace Prize. My only instructions are to be brief. The cartoon in yesterday's Australian will have been considered by some to be in bad taste : but it did make a point. It showed the late President Sadat and the late General Dayan — adversaries of old — in a heavenly cloud looking down on the Earth and specifically the Middle East. President Sadat is captioned as saying :

'Notice how things seem a lot simpler from up here'.

The Australian, 19th October, 6.

It is easy to try to escape the harsh realities of this world and to yearn for heavenly peace and simplicity. It is also easy to retreat to bellicosity, catch-cries and nationalistic or other intolerance. It is much harder to do things — even little things — to promote peace, reconciliation and understanding amongst men and women everywhere.

We are here today because we have chosen the harder path. As we meet, war, catastrophe, crisis and confrontation exist in the four corners of the world. The Media Peace Prize is a practical Australian initiative to reward the most constructive efforts of those who, in the year past, have used the modern media of communication to promote the non-violent resolution of conflicts in Australia. Through courts, through Parliaments and through the ballot box, we in Australia have devised means to promote the non-violent resolution of domestic conflicts. The Media Peace Prize seeks to encourage those who use the media to a responsible approach to their enormous potential for influence and persuasion.

The UNESCO Constitution points out that:

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. The ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, through the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world, through which their differences have all too often broken into war.

The Australian media and its participants are sometimes assailed for sensationalising, personalising or trivialising information and opinion. The Media Peace Prize seeks to recognise some of the many who properly see journalism and communication as a high calling with responsibilities that match the power.

The Prize was launched in 1979 by the United Nations Association of Australia. Since its initiation here it has been followed by many other countries who, in 1981, are conducting their own Media Peace Prize. The guidelines for eligibility are not rigid. But they direct the attention of the judges to communication through the media which:

- . creates understanding instead of reinforcing prejudice
- . pursues the complexity of truth rather than simplistic superficialities
- . expounds problems but also points to non-violent solutions
- . bridges gaps, nationally and internationally rather than promotes further alienation among men and women

Some will say this is a starry-eyed endeavour. Some may claim that we are up on that heavenly cloud. It is true that this prize has high ideals; but we should not be embarrassed about that. Some will say it is a 'drop' into today's media ocean. But the vastly increased number and quality of entries this year shows that knowledge about the prize is now spread widely throughout the media in Australia. Clearly, this prize is valued and is here to stay. Some may say it is an improper endeavour to influence the free press. But the price of press freedom is responsibility and its consideration from time to time of higher ideals.

Specific tribute should again be paid to Mrs. Stella Cornelius of the United Nations Association, whose idea this was. The success of the idea can be seen by the highest form of flattery: its imitation and spread through many different countries of the world.

There are many worthy prizes offered to the media: Oscars, Sammys, Logies, Walkleys: the lot. Last year I suggested that we should have called this one the 'Stella'. Having seen the prize this year, I suspect it will have become known as the 'Handy Andy'. Its aims are lofty. It is decided by judges outside the industry according to criteria which are quite unique. It is my hope that its influence will continue to spread: for it is surely an influence for good.