

MEDIA PEACE PRIZE 1980

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE, 20 OCTOBER 1980

THE AUSTRALIAN MEDIA PEACE PRIZE

The Hon. Mr. Justice M.D. Kirby

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My task is to 'define' the Media Peace Prize. I am under instructions to do so briefly. Of course, a lawyer (and a judge) is almost professionally incapable of brevity. One famous English judge never hesitated to speak for hours on occasions such as this. He once confided to a colleague that he never troubled when the audience looked at its watch. How do you know when to stop, he was asked. 'It's when they look at their watch and shake it, that I know'.

Another judge on one occasion droned on for an hour and a half. He finished what he had to say with the following pearls:

Mr. Chairman. I fear I have gone on far too long. I do apologise to everyone. You see, the trouble is I have no watch with me. And there is no clock in the hall.

From the back of the hall came a laconic comment:

There is a calendar on the wall behind you.

I shall be brief. There is a calendar in front of us all. It reminds us of the transiency and fragile quality of human existence. 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.

The last weekend saw citizens of Australia at the polls. Great issues were debated. There was much conflict and confrontation. Through courts, through Parliaments and through the ballot box, we have devised means, nationally, to promote the non-violent resolution of conflict. The Media Peace Prize seeks to encourage those who use the media

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 attendant power.

The Prize was launched last year by the United Nations Association of Australia. Since its initiation here it has been followed by 19 other countries who, in 1980, 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. It is true that it 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 shows that knowledge about the prize is now spread widely throughout the media in Australia. Some will say it is an endeavour to influence the free press. But the price of press freedom is responsibility and at least the occasional consideration of higher ideals.

Tribute should 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, Sammies, Logies, Walkleys: the lot. Perhaps we should have called this one the 'Stella'. Certainly 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.