

## SEMINAR J – FIGHTING FEAR

### Scared Stiff! – Fear and it's impact on our lives

#### Key themes / issues / questions arising from discussion:

Michael Thorn – DPC, Crime Advisor

- Public perceptions of crime don't match the reality of crime, generally overestimate crime eg burglary and car theft falling
- Inaccurate perceptions can distort policy making and make people feel unnecessarily insecure
- Concern about crime is genuine, criminals do cause harm, and deny people their rights
- Media does not allow time for crime to be put into perspective, and thus adds to fear
- TV and drama is dominated by crime and crime stories
- Crime profile of WA: Perth is a very safe city, WA is a very safe place, likelihood of being victim is very small, more police than ever before, statistically dominated by aboriginality
- The age-crime curve shows most perpetrators are under 30 or young
- Assault rates have been increasing continually (parallel to increasing economic growth rate) govt considering community violence prevention strategy currently
- Alcohol use is often a part of crime
- Perceptions of crime as more common than they actually are, not necessarily surprising, given information reporting and media
- People feel safer walking and jogging at night than on public transport
- Numbers of people seeing crime as a major problem in the community is dropping
- WA govt approach is "tough on crime, tough on causes of crime" together with a marketing strategy about crime
- The challenge is to realign perceptions with reality, will be slow but there is lots we can do, look at the issue of trust between people/govt/institutions/services to address crime, more and better information about crime
- Fear plays a role but its not all bad, it has been a critical determinant for our survival evolutionarily speaking
- Faith in judicial system needs to be higher, and needs of victims need to be addressed, can't leave it all to the police to solve crime
- Public culture, fortress housing, alarm etc contributes to fear of crime and can actually increase crime
- Risk of getting it wrong, misallocation of public resources trying to tackle law and order
- Question: politicians contribute to the fear, by focusing on law and order initiatives publicly – to reduce fear, should we not state publicly that the perception is out of line? Doesn't curfew fuel the fear? Answer: need to build public confidence and they want more police on the street
- Discussion/debate on Northbridge curfew

Jack Smit – Project Safecom

- Speeches by Dr Carmen Lawrence on fear on the Project Safecom website

- False consciousness about boat people, legal rights to seek asylum vs “illegal/unlawful” immigrants
- Fear causes people to spread false consciousness for a purpose ie boat people/tampa election (see *Dark Victory*)
- Fear of politicians setting themselves up regardless of international laws and convention and decent humane norms and standards
- Fear about hijacking of democratic process and accountability, and replacing with spin and dirty wedge politics
- Rural Australians for refugees slogan – “when you know the facts you will open your hearts”
- Political strategists frightening Australians about immigrants coming to Australia and fear of loss of national identity, national control
- Fear is a recurring theme of right wing politics
- Globalised planet = permeable borders, therefore systems to control border movement, globalisation at the exclusion of those without jobs and identification
- Anti-dote, transform fear into creativity and activism, like the political cartoonists, remain open, know your enemies, to be independent frank and fearless – we owe it to ourselves, loved ones and silenced oppressed to fight without fear

**Rosemary Longhurst** – Religious Society of Friends

- Fear and violence and crisis in the media, negative messages, including redemptive violence
- Peace is more than the absence of war, it requires effort, trust, creation
- Personal responsibility vs leave it to the professionals is creating a culture where we believe we have no agency of our own
- Fear is unhealthy when it becomes paralysis, and life denying
- How do we move past fear, worry, fixation? Learn to trust ourselves, taking small acts of faith, to be lifesavers rather than sidelined with paralysis, we need to test ourselves, practice, train, push ourselves further
- Perceived impotence of diplomatic advocacy can lead people to violence
- Build on existing community links in peace structures, reach out beyond comfort zones, make human connections, create small circles, make connections between *us and them*
- There are only two feelings, languages, activities, frameworks etc Love and Fear.

**2. Person / People to contact (include email / phone) for further information about this issue / session:**

*Turning the Corner* publication, recent trends in crime in WA – see Office of Crime prevention website [www.crimeprevention.wa.gov.au](http://www.crimeprevention.wa.gov.au)

For information about refugees in Australia see [www.safecom.org.au](http://www.safecom.org.au)

See *Making Terrorism History* (by Rifkind and Elworthy) for possible solutions to second generation cultural problems