

Profits win out over human rights

By Joseph Barratt



New Zealand loves to think it's a peace-loving nation.

We hold our heads high, we say what needs to be said and help when we are needed.

We refused to send troops to Iraq, we help keep the peace in East Timor, and we even get into political battles to stop whaling.

On the surface, New Zealand looks great. We even rank second in the world in terms of how peaceful we are through the Global Peace Index.

"We will continue to further our agenda for a peaceful, secure world through a number of different forums," Helen Clark proudly

proclaimed.

Then why did New Zealand reintroduce military ties with Indonesia late last year?

We had cut ties in 1999 after mass human rights abuses in East Timor at the hands of Indonesia.

Those abuses over a 20-year period saw the death of hundreds of thousands of people, climaxing with the Dilli massacre that hit headlines around the world.

At the time, Foreign Affairs Minister Phil Goff had announced that ties would not be re-established until those responsible for the atrocities were found accountable and democracy had been strengthened.

Just two years ago, Helen Clark reaffirmed New Zealand's

commitment to not renewing ties, noting a concern at the continuing lack of accountability of those that committed the abuses.

So it made me scratch my head to hear the Government

international initiative aimed at combating religious and cultural extremism and therefore violence.

Sounds great. For sure, a very worthy cause, but it does raise a few questions

when the likes of Ali Alatas is warmly invited by Helen Clark.

Alatas was Indonesia's

Foreign Affairs Minister during the bloody occupation of East Timor, and was in charge at the time of the Dilli massacre.

Where are the high heads calling for accountability now?

In fact Helen Clark's speech at the opening of the symposium announced that Alatas has been "a good friend of New Zealand's for many years".

Indonesia has not changed. There are still countless stories of

ongoing human rights abuses in the country, especially in provinces such as West Papua and Aceh.

Several months after the symposium, surprise surprise, New Zealand announced new trade initiatives with Indonesia.

Goff also announced New Zealand had already exported \$653 million in goods to the large nation, up 32 per cent from the previous year.

So we re-establish military ties and we make an extra \$200 million in less than a year.

The never-ending worship of the god known as profits prevailed once again. It is not an isolated incident. There are plenty of similar situations that New Zealand is involved in.

We talk of human rights and decency for some nations yet we ignore them in others. Are our ethics for sale? It looks like it.

"So we re-establish military ties and we make an extra \$200 million in less than a year."

announcement that New Zealand would be receiving some Indonesian officers for training.

No high-ranking Indonesian officers ever faced serious punishment for what occurred in East Timor.

Sudden about-turn? Yes, but don't worry, we're getting to the answer.

Several months ago New Zealand hosted the Alliance of Civilisations Symposium, an

Don't write off the dogged Welsh just yet

By Joanna Davies



Not surprisingly, All Blacks' stories have dominated our Rugby World Cup coverage.

Not that it's a bad thing – the team's so far sparkling tour deserves praise, minding those handling errors against Scotland. Then again, it's old news.

Everybody in the major rugby-playing nations knows that the All Blacks have the best shot at the cup. Other teams that were deemed to be contenders – current cup holders England, for example – are only proving New Zealand's team is the strongest. And once again, our coverage is forgetting the underdogs.

On Saturday, the final pool match between Wales and Fiji will take place, which will decide which team progresses through to the quarter-final. Heading into one of the biggest days in recent rugby history for the boys from the valleys, the team has a lot to prove after their declining performance since winning the Six Nations Grand Slam in 2005.

Their cup run this year hasn't been terrible. Wales has won two games out of three, losing to Australia by only 12 points.

They won by 54 points in their last game – even if it was against rugby minnows Japan.

Some might say Fiji could be a force to be reckoned with, especially when considering the majority of the Welsh team, much like the principality's people, tend to be on the shorter side.

In the history of clashes between the teams, Wales have come out better-off against Fiji every single time.

In the six games played between the teams since 1985, Wales has usually beaten Fiji by more than four points – and for Wales that is very successful.

Admittedly when the teams met in 2005, Wales only won by one, but what's one not-so-good score to tarnish the track record?

And Wales have every reason to be hopeful – Australia put 43 points on Fiji a few days ago.

For morale, captain Gareth Thomas has returned to training ahead of the weekend's game after recovering from a rib injury, and in the process will become

the first Welshman to play 100 games for his country.

Being a lone Welsh girl surrounded by

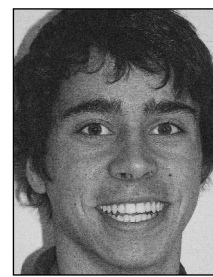
supporters in black, I'm quite looking forward to the game that not so many are interested in this weekend. Not so many in this hemisphere anyway.

I'll be getting up at some terrible hour of the morning, which isn't uncommon since most Welsh games are played around 2am New Zealand time, and I will be singing with the rest of them, hoping that the light will shine on God's Country's team. And if they don't win, I guess I'm used to it anyway.

"If they don't win, I guess I'm used to it."

In defence of Christianity

By Dylan Quinnell



Muslims want to take over the world!

What first comes to mind reading that? I would imagine for some it is agreement and either fear or anger.

For others it is the thought that I must be an Islamophobe.

However if I was to say that Christians want to take over the world, I would hazard a guess that most of you would respond with an angry or mocking 'yeah'.

What I am getting at is double standards.

Having a go at Christianity has become a relatively common practice. It is protected by ideals of free speech, but it ignores the ideals of a multicultural society, such as protection of diversity.

Why is this the case? Well, I would argue that it's because Christianity as a major religion, has been with us a long time and has grown too familiar. I would also argue that it comes down to misunderstandings.

Let me clear one thing up right away. Christians are people before they are Christians.

People have many different views on any one issue based on their own morals and life experiences.

Christians are no different. There are liberal Christians who support abortion in certain situations and do not bear judgement on homosexuality, while there are more conservative Christians who are vehemently against both.

What is important to remember is people occur somewhere along a continuum. Therefore, what one Christian states as

Misunderstandings also stem from faith, religion and God.

This was obvious when the media jumped on comments made by Anglican Bishop Richard Randerson.

Bishop Randerson said if the definition of an agnostic was someone who felt God's existence could not be scientifically proven one way or the other, then by that measure he was agnostic.

Some in the media, with very little understanding or care for religion, pounced on this saying he was a bishop who had given up on God; and subsequently made fools out of themselves.

What I would finally remind you of is the good Christianity has done, both for people and societies.

Many of the people who care for the homeless, the prostitutes, the poor and disabled – all those society often forgets – are Christian.

Amnesty International is Christian-based, so were many of the people in the movement to end slavery, although admittedly many were on the opposing side too.

All Christians are asking for is the kind of respect they would be afforded if their religion was a little more exotic.

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