

# THE SALVATION ARMY AND THE STATE

**SERIES: TAKING A STAND**

**EXPLORING THE ARMY'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENTS**

*Members of the International Moral and Social Issues Council (IMASIC) reflect on The Salvation Army's International Positional Statements.*

## STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army is politically nonpartisan. Although it seeks to influence governmental and public affairs, it will not promote or endorse specific candidates or political parties.

In working with any State and its agencies, The Salvation Army seeks to promote biblical values, including justice, truth, mercy, equity, human rights and peace, as part of its religious convictions and practice.

Download the complete *International Positional Statement on The Salvation Army and the State* at [salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips](http://salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips)

Jesus, the master teacher, did not leave this important topic of Church and State unaddressed during his earthly ministry. He peremptorily dealt with the issue when, as recorded in Matthew chapter 22, hostile Pharisee and Herodian questioners tried to force Jesus into publicly taking a stand on whether Jews should or should not pay taxes to the Roman authorities. Many of them anticipated that they would succeed in trapping Jesus this way. If opposing the tax (as they assumed he would), Jesus would have been handed over to the governor, who was Pilate, to be charged. Jesus famously and wisely answered: 'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's' (Matthew 22:21).

Jesus masterfully set the pace by establishing equal opportunities for the Church and the State, a principle which The Salvation Army has skilfully and spiritually embraced for the betterment and the greater good of humanity. Seeing that Jesus differentiated between these two spheres, the *International Positional Statement on The Salvation Army and the State* holds that 'the State is established by God for securing justice and doing good' and that 'by virtue of its doctrines, its approach and its reputation, The Salvation Army is particularly called to work with those who live in poverty or who have otherwise been marginalised'.

The government will continue to be in charge of building roads, national defence, international trade, courts, etc, while the Church will feed the people with spiritual food, religious instruction, abundant life for the living and burial for the dead. However, the areas of Church and State responsibility are not completely separate from each other; experience has shown that working in partnership is the way to go.

'Consequently,' the International Positional Statement affirms, 'The Salvation Army seeks opportunities to work in cooperation with the State and its agencies whenever their actions promote a just and fair society... to deliver and provide humanitarian and social services that benefit people without discrimination.' In all its relationships with local authorities, The Salvation Army always observes a non-partisan attitude irrespective of politics.

**FOR REFLECTION**

- \* What is the Army's involvement with the State in your community and how could it be improved?
- \* In which area of a government partnership would you consider getting involved?
- \* What opportunities for community awareness has the COVID-19 pandemic exposed to you?

**CASEY O'BRIEN MACHADO**

Policy and Social Justice Advisor  
*Australia Territory*

**PERSONAL REFLECTION**

This International Positional Statement raises important considerations for us – organisationally and as individual Salvationists. On both levels, our mission is to see God's Kingdom come – to see this world become a clearer reflection of the world to come. If we're engaged with the world around us – if we care that the world looks like the Kingdom of God – we will naturally be engaged in the political sphere. This engagement will look different in different places, and I acknowledge that I write from a privileged position, living in a country where it is relatively easy as a Christian to live in harmony with the State. Nevertheless, in all places, engagement with the State is necessary.

Sadly, there is a common belief amongst many that The Salvation Army is non-political, and this has caused some confusion for Salvationists. This is incorrect. The Salvation Army is not party political, but it is certainly political! As General Eva Burrows stated, 'While I definitely feel that the Army should have no partisan bias, I believe we should feel strongly about social injustice. If political means speaking out... to quicken the conscience of the government on the needs of the people, then I'm political.'

Furthermore, we have a responsibility as Salvationists to engage with the State. As citizens

of both the Kingdom of God and the countries in which we live, we can't avoid politics. It's not a matter of whether we should or shouldn't be on the side of the marginalised or advocate for others, it's a matter of how we do that. In his book *Pursuing Justice*, Ken Wytsma wrote, 'Even when Christians agree on the end of biblical justice that protects the vulnerable... there is still the question of how that end is best achieved.' Our priority in our engagement with the State, rather than choosing a party to side with, is to make sure that we're informed as individuals and that what we're supporting is biblical, holy and is bringing the Kingdom of God to earth.

At times, we can learn from the State. While the Church has a role to play in exemplifying Kingdom values to the State, it must admit that, at times, the State reflects the Kingdom more clearly than the Church. In Australia, one such example, among others, is that of paid parental leave. While The Salvation Army values the importance of family life (as evidenced in the Soldier's Covenant), paid parental leave for its employees was only introduced in 2020, while such leave was introduced for Australian commonwealth workers in 1973.

As we seek God's Kingdom, may we engage in every avenue available to us, including that of engagement with the State.



### MAJOR VILECE THOMAS

Training Principal and Territorial Liaison Officer  
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*Caribbean Territory*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION

Reflecting on the partnership between The Salvation Army and the State, my mind goes back to 1 August 1973 when the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) was established to fulfil the hope of integration and synergy in the West Indies, with Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados and Trinidad as founding members. Today, the community counts 15 full member states, eight associate members and five observers. The West Indies Cricket Team remains one of CARICOM's truest expressions.

Having had the privilege of living and working in six Caribbean and South American countries, including St Maarten, Guyana, Haiti, French Guiana, Suriname and Jamaica, I have seen first-hand how The Salvation Army has become a beacon in saving souls, growing saints and serving suffering humanity while working closely with different local governments and yet remaining politically non-partisan.

The Salvation Army has been building a strong and significant bridge of hope connecting with the State in the Caribbean since the territory's inception in 1887 in Jamaica. Now the Caribbean Territory comprises 16 countries, including Belize in Latin America, and Suriname, French Guiana and Guyana in South America. Sustainable partnerships between the Army and the 16 states are active in meeting public needs in education, healthcare, social

welfare, and arts and culture. Our ongoing presence in people's lives, whether by providing practical assistance or spiritual regeneration, coupled with our efficient way of working, make us a force to reckon with.

In the wake of COVID-19, there is an urgent need to build stronger partnerships between the Army and these States. Thousands of people have been left with no income, and many chairs have become empty by the passing of loved ones due to the virus. The Army will need to continue to serve with new methods and strategies in order to reach the different layers of the communities at the point of their needs.

A group close to my heart are prisoners. Serving twice as a prison chaplain, I have seen hardcore prisoners turn their lives around through the love of Jesus. But I have learned also that prisoners are sometimes the least-reached group in society. They are locked away and cut off from others. Many prisoners reside in cultures that do not rehabilitate those behind bars. Often, they serve their entire time without knowing the love of Jesus, God's mercy and forgiveness. Especially during this pandemic where people are isolated in many cases, prison ministry is an excellent avenue for the Army to continue to explore, by offering online spiritual care and a listening ear to prisoners. In partnership with authorities this has the potential to bear fruit if done in the name of Jesus.

The words of General John Gowans couldn't be more poignant:

*There are people hurting in the world out there.*

*They need you, they need me, they need Christ. (SASB 935)*

**COLONEL DANIEL RAJU DASARI**

Territorial Commander  
*India Northern Territory*

### PERSONAL REFLECTION

Last April, I received a call from India's Ministry of Home Affairs, inviting me to a virtual meeting in which the need for The Salvation Army's support was shared as the whole nation was facing the coronavirus pandemic. We were pleased to know of their trust in our organisation to serve suffering humanity throughout the country.

The Salvation Army in India has always respected the government, regardless of which party was in power. It has maintained its non-partisan principle by not following any political leader or party but by supporting them in every good work for the population. At the same time, our ministry has been recognised by the central, state and local governments.

During the British Rule, The Salvation Army was entrusted to look after the settlement colonies for criminal tribal people and received from state governments huge tracts of land. It opened schools, children's homes and clinics, and established community programmes to help the residents reintegrate into normal life.

Since long before India's independence, the Army has served in the fields of education, health, social and emergency relief work, and through community empowerment programmes, especially for women. Apart from our general hospitals, the Army does great work with people affected by leprosy, arranging homes for them and looking

after their children. All without discrimination and with the government's blessing.

Often, The Salvation Army in India responds to natural calamities quickly and efficiently thanks to our good relationship with the authorities. When HIV/Aids was a big issue, the Indian territories' awareness programmes were much appreciated by state governments. Our current COVID-19 relief programmes are the best recent examples of a successful partnership with local authorities.

The Salvation Army in India has never criticised any parties or governments. However, as a member of the National Council of Churches in India, we have stood together in peaceful protest to support Christians experiencing persecution. Since the majority of our soldiers come from the Dalit community<sup>1</sup>, The Salvation Army joined with other churches to raise our voices on their behalf when they were struggling for their civil rights.

In my 30 years of ministry I've had opportunities to invite government officials or political leaders to visit our programmes and several times I have been invited by government officials to bless their programmes with a prayer.

We regularly join meetings with other church leaders to pray for the nation, for its challenges and its leaders. Scripture urges, 'that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all

people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour' (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Belonging to the lowest caste in India, characterised as untouchable