



*MEDIA RELEASE* - 27 March 2003

## STUDENT PROTESTS NEED A RATIONAL RESPONSE

ACSSO President Judith Bundy expressed concern at yesterday's student protests, some of which were marked by violence and involved young people of primary school age.

The violent actions shown at yesterday's demonstration are a timely warning however, that peaceful student protests may be manipulated by others with a more subversive intent. Apparently such was the case yesterday. Certainly, primary school students would be much better off joining their parents in well organised peaceful protests outside of school hours.

Parents do not support any kind of violent protest. They do however support the right to give permission to their children to participate in such actions, even if they are held in school time. Students beyond the compulsory leaving age do not require such consent.

This is not breaking any law as Minister Nelson implies in his media release. In contrast to the Minister's view, thinking Australians acknowledge and cherish the right to exercise free speech in our democratic country.

Parents understand that many students have very deep feelings about the human tragedy of war. They may well be very confused and angry that their government believes that war is an acceptable means of achieving peace, when non-violent resolution of differences is a prevailing value taught in Australian schools. These same schools teach critical thinking skills and analysis of contemporary events, so the war will inevitably be the subject of discussion.

ACSSO strongly supports the role of teachers in assisting students to work through the issues that are raised in their classrooms. Education departments are, (and if they are not they should be) providing advice as to how teachers may appropriately and impartially respond to student concerns about the conflict in Iraq.

Australian students are caught up in this conflict. Educators, parents and politicians need to deal sensitively and rationally with student concerns.

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For further information and comment

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