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ACRATH News

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans

Canberra Advocacy Report

September 2016

Team ACRATH 2016

Team ACRATH 2016 consisted of 13 advocates. We worked on the Canberra advocacy project over a period of about 8 weeks; the project included preparation, a week in Canberra advocating and follow ups.

Background briefing material was emailed to team members each week prior to arriving in Canberra. The team then gathered on Sunday 11 September for an afternoon of training; we examined the task Ahead. At the very least we wanted to get traction on the three main advocacy points!



We stayed at the Gathering Place, a centre for Brigidine spirituality, and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Centre.

Advocacy Points

ACRATH acknowledged the bipartisan support for policy work on human trafficking.

ACRATH believes positive change has grown out of the genuine collaboration between government and civil society.

Keys points of advocacy included:

- 1. ACRATH is asking MPs to support ACRATH and the other funded NGOs to do counter trafficking work over the next three years. This is work the Australian government must do to meet international obligations.**
ACRATH needs funding to raise awareness, ACRATH has developed a kit for Australian secondary schools on forced marriage, ACRATH wants to make the supply chains of Australian goods slavery free, ACRATH needs funding to provide personal support for trafficked women and their children in Australia
- 2. ACRATH is asking MPs to address the needs of overseas workers facing forced and exploited labour in Australia.**
ACRATH is advocating for: The licensing of labour hire companies, Prosecutions of exploitative employers of overseas workers, The protection of the rights of overseas workers, Payment of back wages to overseas workers, Mechanisms to link overseas workers in to Australian society
- 3. ACRATH is asking MPs to support the move to establish a national compensation scheme for people who have been trafficked into Australia.** There is no current form of redress at a national level for federal trafficking offences.

In an article, first published in the September 2016 edition of *The Good Oil*, the e-magazine of the Good Samaritan Sisters, ACRATH team member Sarah Puls sgs wrote:

... Sometimes I feel like our job in ACRATH is to be a pebble in the shoe of people who have the power to make the real changes to address these issues. Sometimes we are a pebble that jumps back into the shoe over and over! We come and tell MPs again about the real people who are affected by these issues.

full text at: <http://www.goodsams.org.au/good-oil/to-be-a-pebble-in-the-shoe-of-people-with-power>



Photos (L-R): ACRATH members with Minister Keenan (Liberal, Justice Minister); Tanya Plibersek ALP, Acting Leader of the Opposition; Adam Bandt, Greens.

Advocacy Week Overview

During the four days ACRATH members met with 51 Members of Parliament, including 4 meetings with Ministers and Ministerial advisors. The MPs were from the Government, the Opposition and the Crossbench; they were from both the House of Representatives and the Senate. We emailed MPs our background material prior to a sub-team of 3 or 4 advocates meeting with them.

'Participating in ACRATH's advocacy week in Parliament was an uplifting experience of democracy at work. The openness of the MPs and Senators of our Australian Parliament to the message and work of ACRATH, highlights the very important place of a living Gospel in Australian life.' First time member of team ACRATH 2016, Colleen Jackson rsc

We also had meetings with staff at four Embassies for whom human trafficking is of particular concern.

The team also met with staff from 8 other key parties: the Australian Federal Police, Attorney-General's Department, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (both Communications and Research), the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Salvation Army Freedom Partnership and Anti-Slavery Australia, and the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office where we gave a one hour presentation to state directors.



Ann Sudmalis—Liberal



David Feeney —ALP



Linda Burney —ALP, first indigenous women in the House of Representatives



Anny Aly —ALP, first Muslim women in Parliament

Outcomes

One significant outcome for ACRATH is that we now have 13 people from across Australia who are knowledgeable about our current ACRATH advocacy concerns. *'Joining other ACRATH members this week to engage and lobby Members of Parliament from all sides of politics on issues of human trafficking was a rich experience for me. Some are familiar with and welcome our presence in Parliament and some still find it hard to believe that this can be happening here in Australia - at least they gave us the time to discuss our concerns and raise some awareness. A week of education on all fronts!'* First time member of team ACRATH 2016, Diana Hayes.

Some MPs were visibly moved by the accounts we shared. Some acknowledged us as a credible source for informing them. Quite a number of MPs commented on how well prepared we were; they were also impressed that we had a place at the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery and that we work with networks across Australia and globally.

Our work to counter human trafficking was mentioned twice in Parliament sittings; on one occasion the Prime Minister was asked in Question time if he would find funding for ACRATH's counter trafficking work.

We left Canberra with much to follow-up. We asked the MPs we met to contact the two relevant Ministers about our concerns. A draft email was circulated to members that they could customise and send on to the Minister. A number of MPs have acknowledged that this action has already been taken.

Every interview was recorded in writing showing the follow-up action. Many MPs requested more information on forced marriage and forced labour, and our request for a National Compensation Scheme.

A number of Senators are interested to raise questions in Senate Estimates. Another MP is proposing to move a motion on human trafficking in Parliament.

The ACRATH team attracted a lot of social media engagement (Facebook and twitter) with postings from within our team as well as from many MPs.

'We have so much respect and admiration for the work you do. All the best'

From the Chief of Staff for a very senior MP.

ACRATH NATIONAL OFFICE

54 Beaconsfield Pde
Albert Park, VIC 3206

Ph: 03 9645 5986
www.acrath.org.au
info@acrath.org.au