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Women Religious Take Trafficking Issues to Canberra

Women religious from throughout Australia will descend on Canberra next week (November 22-24) to discuss human trafficking with federal politicians, community leaders, academics union bosses and foreign embassy staff. Members of ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans) will discuss global and local issues with policy makers in a bid to prevent trafficking of people into Australia. The Sisters will also ask politicians to play a bigger role in international prevention.

The fourth annual visit, involving almost 50 meetings with key policy makers, comes at a crucial time. The Federal Government has convened a National Roundtable on Human Trafficking on Wednesday (November 24) to examine trafficking issues and some major announcements are expected.

Brigidine Sister Louise Cleary, who is Chair of the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH), will participate in the National Roundtable and will also be a part of the week-long delegation to Canberra.

Many federal politicians from all parties have agreed to meet the Sisters, including the Minister for Home Affairs and Justice, Brendan O'Connor, Minister for Women, Kate Ellis, and Liberals Judi Moylan and Phillip Ruddock. CFMEU union leaders are also keen to discuss labour trafficking in the construction industry.

Sr Louise said the delegation would focus on four main concerns:

1. The Prevention of trafficking and specifically achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and raising Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding to 0.5% of Gross Domestic Income (GDI) by 2015-16.

ACRATH would also like Australia to commit to promoting Fairtrade products where it has influence, for example within the Australian Parliament House and the food and clothing supplies for Australian Armed Forces.

2. That people trafficked into Australia be able to access financial compensation for the crime committed against them in Australia.

3. That people trafficked into Australia will have safe and supportive accommodation as they wait to contribute to prosecutions and as they begin their long journey of healing.

4. That labour trafficking into Australia has become a matter of grave concern, for example, in the construction, mining, fruit picking and vegetable growing industries.

Sr Louise said the last few years had seen some excellent changes in the treatment of people who had been trafficked into Australia, particularly in the area of visa reform, but there was still a way to go.



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She said people who had been trafficked into Australia and forced to work in harsh conditions, stripped of human rights, should be treated justly once they were free from their traffickers and in Australia's care.

"We are continuing to seek a better outcome for trafficked women and men, but we also want our leaders to take a really global approach to prevention and to look beyond our shores to see what can be done in the area of prevention," Sr Louise said.

"We know poverty is one of the main issues that forces people, particularly women to leave their homes, villages and country to pursue work. In many developing countries this makes them vulnerable to traffickers. So alleviating poverty is a key to the prevention of trafficking."

A research report by Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), released last week, found that reluctance of trafficked persons to report to authorities suggests that a number of cases may go unidentified.

The Minister for Home Affairs and Justice Brendan O'Connor welcomed the AIC report, saying that while the number of identified cases of trafficking to Australia is relatively low, the hidden nature of the crime means the problem might be more extensive than the data shows.

MEDIA CONTACT

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