



Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans

President's Report to the Annual General Meeting

27 February 2015

Preface

In June 2014 many of us attended the funeral of Sister Carol Hogan sss, former National Secretary of ACRATH, deeply valued member of the National Committee and long time, highly engaged member of ACRATH Victoria. In the months that followed several ACRATH members spoke to me of how much they missed her which has led me to reflect further on her very special contribution. For a significant part of her life she had lived the life of a contemplative religious; the eucharist was the focus of her spiritual life and the subject of her doctoral thesis. Embracing feminist theology she often privileged the image of God as Sophia. We are grateful to Shane Wood for gathering the many reflections she prepared for ACRATH meetings into a booklet which may be helpful in your regional contexts. I think she also revealed some of the hidden dimensions of ACRATH that we do not report on, but can allude to. We are here as contemplatives in action, united in our response to the gospel of Jesus, potentially gifts to one another and to the people with whom we connect in this work, who in their turn also grace us.

The Changing Ecclesial Context in which we operate

ACRATH which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year is part of a global response to human trafficking by religious institutes since 2001, within Australia, since 2005. The past fifteen months have been marked by initiatives at the Vatican in relation to combating human trafficking which demonstrate the lucidity, passion and decisive action of Pope Francis in his approach to this issue.

In November 2013 he commissioned a preparatory workshop on "Trafficking in Human Beings: Modern Slavery", hosted by the Pontifical Academy for the Sciences and Social Sciences and the World Federation of the Catholic Medical Association which brought together experts on the issue from across the world. (November 8-9, 2013) The Statement on Trafficking in Human Beings which marked its conclusion spoke of "*our moral imperative to make ours the last generation that has to fight the trade in human lives*" with detailed suggestions for action on the part of the Holy See, International Organisations, Governments, Civil Society, the Business Community, Christians, Religions and All People of Good Will.

On March 17 2014, the Global Freedom Network, a new organisation led by the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Grand Imam of Al Azar University in Cairo and, the head of the Walk Free Foundation, was launched to galvanise global action to eradicate modern forms of slavery and human trafficking by 2020.

In April, 2014 the Pope attended a Conference at the Vatican organised by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, Combating Human Trafficking: Church and Law Enforcement in Partnership, which included law enforcement authorities from twenty countries, humanitarian and social workers, including women religious, and former trafficking survivors. Pope Francis at its conclusion said: *The very fact of our being here to combine our efforts means that we want our strategies and areas of expertise to be accompanied by the mercy of the Gospel, by closeness to men and women who are victims of this crime.*”

A Vatican symposium for young people aged from 15-25: Youth Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking, was held from 15-16 November, 2014 and attracted participants from across the world interested in increasing their knowledge and skills in combating this evil. The Pope who instigated the initiative met with the participants.

On December 2, 2014, International Day for the Elimination of Slavery, for the first time in history, leaders from the world’s major religions gathered in the Vatican and signed a Declaration of Religious Leaders against Slavery.

The Pope stated: *“Inspired by our confessions of faith, we are gathered here today for an historical initiative and to take concrete action: to declare that we will work together to eradicate the terrible scourge of modern slavery in all its forms. ... On behalf of them all (the victims) our communities of faith are called to reject, without exception, any systematic deprivation of individual freedom for the purposes of personal or commercial exploitation..... Let us call to action all persons of faith and their leaders, governments, businesses, all men and women of good will, to lend their unwavering support and to join the movement against slavery, in all its forms.”*

Pope Francis also prepared a very detailed Message on Human Trafficking for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2015, entitled: *“Slaves no more, but Brothers and Sisters”*.

In November 2014, Pope Francis declared 8 February, the feast of St Josephine Bakhita, to be the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking.

Following meetings of representatives from ACRATH with the Apostolic Nuncio and the Australian Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life in September last year and regional contacts with local bishops, we were approached to assist in providing materials on human trafficking to be disseminated under the auspices of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and ACRATH to every diocese and every parish for 8 February, the feast day of St Josephine Bakhita. Our work has received greater recognition as a ministry of the Church within Australia in this past year.

A Renewal of Government Funding through the Attorney General’s Department

ACRATH received funding of \$360,000 for another three year period, 2014 -2017, and an additional amount of \$61,000 to develop a curriculum for schools in relation to forced marriage. Assured funding has enabled ACRATH to address the strategic objectives we accepted at the National Conference in 2014 for the next triennium in a systematic way and to take new initiatives. Two progress reports were submitted to the Attorney General’s Department in 2014.

Progress Report in Relation to ACRATH's Strategic Objectives (2014-2017)

Some of the areas of achievement have been as follows.

Objective 1: Raise awareness of human trafficking, its causes and the scope for action

- In 2014, 203 presentations were given in NSW, VIC, SA, WA, QLD and ACT to schools, parishes, and specific community groups, including young people and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.
- The ACRATH online education resource that was originally developed in Victoria has been promoted with ACRATH NSW.
- The ACRATH Radio Awareness Project (RAP) has engaged with migrant chaplains in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. There have been six follow up requests to date for material to distribute in CALD parishes. In South Australia contact has been through the Archdiocesan multi-cultural office and through the diocesan office in Port Pirie. A presentation as part of the pre-Christmas Mass for African communities in Adelaide was well received.
- ACRATH members in South Australia presented at the Australian Catholic Youth Festival in Adelaide. Two University students, associates of ACRATH SA, were selected to join Carolyn Kitto and the team from Stop the Traffik to visit textile factories in northern India in February 2015.
- In the Australian Capital Territory, there have been many presentations delivered at schools, community and Parish organisations covering issues such as Fairtrade, ethical supply chains and the cotton industry. Postcards on slavery-free chocolate have also been widely distributed.
- ACRATH members in Queensland have visited regional areas, such as Toowoomba, Gympie and Rockhampton, to raise awareness of human trafficking and to promote 'cluster groups' in these areas. The Calendar produced by ACRATH Queensland has been an effective awareness raising strategy.
- ACRATH members in Western Australia were instrumental in arranging and publicising the workshop on human trafficking by the Freedom Network in Perth in November. They also conducted workshops in regional Geraldton.
- ACRATH NSW had a stall for two days during the Semester 2 orientation days at Australian Catholic University Strathfield campus.
- ACRATH members in Victoria continue to advance the on-going development of the Young Professional Group and the further engagement with schools regarding the Education Resource.
- The ACRATH website, nominated for the Inaugural Restless Press Southern Cross Digital Media Awards, was placed first in two sections, Best Call to Action and Best Use of Social Media. In 2014, 128 items were uploaded to the ACRATH website; there were 89 email communications and 6 e-news. The website, as well as the Facebook and Twitter pages, have been well utilised within the wider community.

Objective 2: Work to ensure that the complex needs of people trafficked into Australia are met

- ACRATH members accompanying a total of 36 women who had been trafficked and referred to ACRATH in Qld, NSW, Vic, and WA, were able to access funds through the *Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters* monies to meet their immediate needs.
- ACRATH has been involved in advocating for financial compensation for victims of trafficking and calling for the establishment of a federal compensation scheme.
- The NSW Project Officer, Noelene Simmons, worked with 20 law students from the Australian Catholic University on financial compensation as part of a Pro Bono project. The students were briefed on the issues involved and are producing material that ACRATH can use when advocating on the issue of financial compensation for people trafficked into Australia.
- Christine Carolan, National Executive Officer, and ACRATH VIC members have continued to meet with Allen's law firm to explore the next phase of ACRATH's collaboration on financial compensation. The retired Allen's partner has offered to come out of retirement to take on another test case at the Tribunal.

Objective 3: To collaborate with like-minded organisations in Australia, in the Asia Pacific region, and globally to advocate for measures to address human trafficking

Relationships with Australian Catholic organisations and national/international organisations

- All regional ACRATH groups have continued to establish new and maintain current relationships with agencies including: Franciscans International; UNANIMA International; Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand; Good Shepherd Sisters Philippines at the Welcome House; Mercy International Association; Caritas Asia; Caritas Australia; Edmund Rice International; Baptist World Aid; Australian Catholic Migration and Refugee Office; Catholic Social Services Australia; Catholic Diocese of Parramatta; Catholic Women's League; Mercycare Inc.; Australian Catholic University.
- The ACRATH statement regarding Australia's upcoming Universal Periodic Review has been circulated to Catholic religious institutes in Australia and to Catholic NGO's in Geneva. The same issues were raised verbally and in writing with the CEDAW shadow report framing group in Australia.
- In the ACT, ACRATH has been represented at gatherings and follow-up discussion meetings regarding the Australia National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018.
- In Sydney and Melbourne, ACRATH members attended a consultation with Polaris (US) regarding the establishment of a hotline for trafficked people.
- In New South Wales and Victoria, members have represented ACRATH at newly formed forced marriage network meetings (Sydney and Melbourne). In New South Wales, 60 organisations attended these meetings.

Advocacy in Collaboration with other Agencies

- Slavery free supply chains: ACRATH members have continued to advocate for slavery-free Easter Chocolate. ACRATH is represented on the Board of Stop the Traffik and, meetings with a representative from Stop the Traffik occurred within the regions.
- In Victoria, ACRATH members met with a representative from UTZ Certified and have had a meeting with Fairtrade Australia. ACRATH staff skyped with Stop the Traffik and the Uniting Church Justice and International Mission to develop plans for Easter 2015.

- ACRATH representatives in meeting with members of Parliament and their advisors in Canberra in September spoke about supply chains and the need to eradicate slavery in the supply chain of goods being imported into Australia. ACRATH was instrumental in progressing approval by the Minister of Justice of the terms of reference for the slavery free supply chain working group of the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery. Christine Carolan, National Executive Officer, has been appointed as a member of this working group.
- Renaming Visas and Visa entitlements: In Canberra, ACRATH engaged with a range of Members of the House of Representatives and Senators advocating for financial compensation for people who have been trafficked into Australia and for an improved visa framework for them. ACRATH has collaborated with the Freedom Partnership, the Red Cross, Anti-Slavery Australia and the Immigration Department to effect improvements to the human trafficking visa system.
- ACRATH raised the issue of the human rights of imprisoned slavery-free supply chain activists in Thailand with relevant ministers in Canberra.

Other Collaborative Initiatives

- In South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, ACRATH members have collaborated with the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and other relevant groups in the areas of information sharing and support. In Adelaide a trafficking preventative initiative, a postcard to alert tertiary students to the questions they should ask in seeking employment, was an outcome of this collaboration.
- In mid-November in Western Australia, ACRATH collaborated with the Freedom Partnership to conduct training sessions for government and non-government professionals on identifying and responding to slavery-like conditions. ACRATH WA invited CALD and family violence community organisations, many of whom attended the training. ACRATH SA was represented at a similar meeting in Adelaide in March.
- The Western Australian ACRATH group has begun working with the Country Women's Association of Western Australia.
- In late October ACRATH Queensland organised a G20 focused Prayer Vigil with other community organisations.

Objective 4: Build a Sustainable Future for ACRATH

- ACRATH incorporated as an Association in 2013, in 2014 gained Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status. Government Funding for the next triennium was supplemented by a generous response from many religious institutes and from the funding initiatives of regional groups, such as the ACRATH QLD 2015 calendar project. Grant monies from the *Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters* were well utilised in addressing immediate needs of trafficked people; an application has been made for another grant from the Fund. ACRATH is grateful for the generosity of the Fund.
- Work on documentation, including a policy handbook, to accompany the Rules of the Association is in progress.
- ACRATH's archives which contain information about human trafficking and ACRATH's past national and regional meetings, projects and advocacy work, funding/grant documents, campaign materials and financial reports are held in the National Office.

ACRATH Staff

In May Christine Carolan was appointed to the new position of National Executive Officer of ACRATH and, Noelene Simmons was re-appointed as NSW Project Officer and the web manager for the period 2014- 2017. Madelaine Curnow was employed for six months, as a National Office worker. Her contract has been extended. Rosie Hoban as Coordinator of the RAP project has had a further extension of her involvement. Anne Walsh was employed in November to assist ACRATH Victoria with the implementation of its education resource. All employment contracts continue to be with Catholic Religious Australia (CRA). In addition, Denise Mulcahy fcJ and Anne McPhee ibvm work as highly valued volunteers in the areas of administration and archives at the National Office.

ACRATH National Committee

In 2014 the members of the National Committee were Carmel Heagerty rsm (Secretary), Shane Wood cfc (Treasurer), Janine Bliss fmm, Noelene Simmons sm, Carole McDonald rsm, Mary Mercer rsj, Lucy van Kessel pbvm (Regional Co-ordinators), Louise Cleary csb and Genny Ryan osu.

Our Appreciation

I thank on behalf of us all, the staff of ACRATH, so ably led by Christine Carolan, for your passion, vision, commitment, professionalism, approachability and sheer hard work. Noelene we congratulate you as our web manager on the recognition given to the ACRATH website in the recent Restless Press Southern Cross Digital Media Awards.

With gratitude I acknowledge the commitment and generosity of members of the National Committee, all of whom juggle their various other commitments to be available for tasks within the regions, as well as for travel, attendance at Committee meetings and progressing the work of the National Committee.

We are particularly grateful to the Brigidine Sisters for their immense generosity in making available space for the National ACRATH Office at Albert Park (Vic), for their hospitality to members of the National Committee, and for myriad forms of support. We also thank the Christian Brothers and Edmund Rice Education Australia who provided office space at Richmond during the building renovations at Albert Park.

We acknowledge, and are grateful for, the continuing endorsement and support of Catholic Religious Australia and are most appreciative of the professional assistance of Mr Dinal Jayamanne, Financial Officer.

We also acknowledge the generosity of Erin Cassell and Will Dunn who provide a voluntary service as evaluators of ACRATH's Strategic Plan enabling us to meet the requirements for the grant from the Attorney General's Department.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge all members and supporters of ACRATH for your dynamic contribution within the regions in combating human trafficking and in attending to the needs of trafficked people.

Towards the Future

While we keep in mind developments in relation to combating human trafficking in the global arena we will continue to build on our current achievements in relation to ACRATH's strategic objectives for the period 2014-2017. This National Conference will provide both inspiration and knowledge to assist us in our task. As always, the energy we generate when we come together will enable us to leave with fresh heart for the year ahead.

Anne Tormey rsm

ACRATH President