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People are NOT for sale

Canberra August 2019

Canberra Advocacy Trip

Five ACRATH members visited Canberra on July 28 and 29; we met with Ministers, ministerial advisors and Shadow Ministers to advocate for the following:

1. ACRATH calls on the Minister for Finance to allocate an Act of Grace payment of \$107,900 to 22 Vanuatu men exploited by a labour hire firm in Australia. The Federal Court's conviction of the labour hire firm for the "egregious exploitation" of 22 Vanuatu workers shows vulnerable foreign workers exploited in Australia while employed under the Australian Government's Seasonal Worker Program, a part of the Australian aid to the Pacific. The \$107,900 would address the non-payment of the workers' salaries, and the theft of their airfares and spending money.

2. ACRATH calls on the government to implement the recommendation of Prof Allan Fels' Migrant Workers' Taskforce to introduce a national labour hire registration scheme. ACRATH notes the Government's in principle agreement to the Migrant Workers' Taskforce recommendations; we believe this will address in part the exploitation currently being experienced by overseas workers and help to realise Goals 1.3 and 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. BOOST AUSTRALIAN OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA)

Australia currently spends just 0.21% of its gross national income, or 21 cents in every \$100, on Australian aid. ACRATH calls on the Government to boost the amount of Australia's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA).

4. FUNDING FOR NGOS

ACRATH's work has been compromised by not receiving Home Affairs funding for the past 12 months. We believe that occasional, ad hoc and only 12 month funding of NGOs makes it difficult for NGOs to achieve their work of crime prevention, advocacy and support for trafficked people. The model used in the past two years to award funding puts us in competition with other counter trafficking NGOs; this is counter productive. We seek one commitment:

ACRATH calls for the inclusion of a 3-5 year funding schema in the Home Affairs departmental budget under the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery.

5. CONGRATULATIONS: We congratulate Parliament for passing the MODERN SLAVERY ACT (2018).

ACRATH appreciates the bipartisan support for policy work on human trafficking and believes positive change has grown out of the genuine collaboration between government and civil society.



Reflections from the advocacy team

During the preparations for our Canberra visit...I headed to Canberra with feelings of excitement, responsibility and camaraderie. And I was not disappointed... I realised the enormity of the role ACRATH has, and the respect ACRATH has within parliament and government departments. Long time, consistent messaging, building relationships and being the voice for change and awareness raising - I feel really privileged to be part of the group representing ACRATH.

Thanks to the team in Canberra who walked with me whilst I learnt about the issues, the linkages, the 'dance' of advocating, and thanks to the wider ACRATH team for their support.

- Cindy Bohan, ACRATH CD Worker



Two significant things about my time advocating in Canberra were:

- reconnecting with staff at the Philippines Embassy and building a collaborative relationship with the new Ambassadors
- helpfulness and suggestions from those whom we met in Parliament House, and their willingness to put us in contact with those who can help us in our work.

- Margaret Ng rsj



Imagine being an ACRATH member knocking on the door of a Federal Parliamentarian for an appointment.

The door opens and a young woman staffer proclaims: "Welcome, I know you, you're from ACRATH and you gave a talk at my Catholic College when I was in high school!" Wow, what a reminder that the relationships we build during all our presentations, visits and interactions are so important in building networks for justice! This thought crossed my mind a number of times during this, our fourteenth annual advocacy visit to the Federal Parliament. These occasions included the wonderful welcome by the staff at The Gathering Place, and the warm welcome expressed by all the parliamentarians, staff and advisors we met ... Our sense was that the visit definitely built on key relationships and nurtured them for ongoing support for trafficked people.

- Claire Griffin csb

The team decided, the advocacy days more than achieved the aims we noted during our planning day:

- to be visible as ACRATH for the new Ministry and Shadow Ministry
- to ensure human trafficking and modern slavery are clear issues for action
- to further our ACRATH agenda on four key areas (see page 1).



In the 10 days since we left Canberra we have had at least 10 follow-up emails, moving our agenda forward.

There has been movement on our proposal for an **Act of Grace** payment. One MP has just forwarded to ACRATH a report on how the Act of Grace mechanism has been used in the past.

After the Allan Fels *Migrant Workers' Taskforce Report* we now believe that there is an appetite within this government to look at **labour hire licensing**. ACRATH will also work with DFAT to promote good working conditions for Pacific workers.

NGO funding: On the International day of Trafficking in Persons, July 30th, the government announced a funding round to happen shortly; the ACRATH national office is working to this end.

Visit to the Philippine Embassy: Margaret Ng rsj has a long time relationship with the Embassy; we discussed Filipinos travelling to Australia on student visas who are vulnerable to exploitative work hire practices and possible human trafficking. Post arrival orientations are an important element in the prevention through awareness raising. ACT ACRATHer Clare Condon sgs will be part of the thinking around this in Canberra, keeping Margaret in the loop.

ACRATH needs core business funding and additional funding for special projects.

Please consider a regular donation to ACRATH so that we can plan ahead.

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