



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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People are NOT for sale



## MEDIA STATEMENT

23 January 2015

*Joint statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH)*

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) support His Holiness Pope Francis in declaring Sunday 8 February 2015, the Feast of St Josephine Bakhita, as World Day of prayer, reflection and action against human trafficking.

The Vatican Secretary of State invited each Episcopal Conference to join the observance on 8 February and contribute to the sensitising of public opinion to this tragic phenomenon, which represents one of the saddest wounds of our time.

The Australian Bishops and ACRATH acknowledge Pope Francis' counter trafficking message for the World Day of Peace on 1 January 2015, *'No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters'*.

In his message Pope Francis invites us 'to practice acts of fraternity towards those kept in a state of enslavement. Let us ask ourselves, as individuals and as communities, whether we feel challenged when, in our daily lives, we meet or deal with persons who could be victims of human trafficking, or when we are tempted to select items, which may well have been produced by exploiting others'.

Bishop Eugene Hurley, Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life said, 'It is imperative that we begin a journey of personal change when we mark the 8 February. Human trafficking exists in Australia and on this planet because we allow it to exist. Let us together, commit to eradicate this affront to our humanity.'

Sr Anne Tormey rsm, President, ACRATH said, 'Following the call from Pope Francis and leaders of the Anglican, Orthodox, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu faiths, "to eradicate the terrible scourge of modern slavery in all its forms", today we join this global initiative. The life of St Josephine Bakhita reminds us of the assault to the dignity, and of the suffering endured by every trafficked person.'

St Josephine Bakhita, who died on 8 February 1947, was born in Southern Sudan in 1869, and during her life experienced kidnapping and slavery. Following her delivery to freedom Josephine dedicated her life to sharing her story and to supporting the poor and suffering. She eventually became a Canossian Sister, living a life of prayer and service for fifty years. She was canonised in 2000.

Despite many efforts to end human trafficking internationally, an estimated 27 million women, men and children today are deprived of their freedom and forced to suffer in

conditions of exploitation and slavery. There is now a compelling need to put an end to trafficking in human beings.

On 8 February, Pope Francis asks us to think of persons trafficked into prostitution, as well as women forced into marriage, without any right to give or withhold their consent.

We remember also people trafficked into Australia to work in the agriculture, construction and hospitality sectors.

And we remember people whose labour is exploited to produce cheap goods for Australians. We remember young boys in West Africa who are trafficked into the cocoa production for Australian chocolate. We remember refugees in Thailand who are trafficked onto fishing vessels to produce cheap fish for Australians to eat. We remember the women in Bangladesh whose exploited labour and unsafe working conditions result in cheap clothing for Australians to wear.

We also remember the 200 female students kidnapped in Nigeria in April 2014 by Boko Haram; reports suggest that many of these girls have been sold or forced into marriages.

The ACBC and ACRATH call for a fourfold commitment to prevention, victim protection, the legal prosecution of perpetrators, and partnerships for change; these require a global effort on the part of various sectors of society.

The ACBC and ACRATH support the statement published by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Social Sciences in November 2013, declaring that 'it is our moral imperative to make ours the last generation that has to fight the trade in human lives'.

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#### **Additional information**

[Pope's message for World Day of Peace](#)

[Parish resources](#)

[The life of St Josephine Bakhita](#) – (3 minute video)

Videos by [Anti-slavery Australia](#) – (three 30 second videos)

Resources from [ACRATH](#)

Factsheet: [What is human trafficking?](#)