



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development

18 July 2018

Dr Sean Turner
Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Dr Turner,

Modern Slavery Bill 2018

This submission from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) as prepared by the Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development (BCJED) is made in support of establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia.

The ACBC is a permanent institution of the Catholic Church in Australia and the instrumentality used by the Australian Catholic Bishops to act nationally and address issues of national significance.

The BCJED is one of a number of commissions established by the ACBC to address important issues both within the Church and in the broader Australian community. The BCJED has responsibility for commenting on modern slavery and human trafficking.

The Catholic community is the largest religious group in Australia with more than one in five Australians identifying as Catholic. The Church provides Australia's largest non-government grouping of hospitals, aged and community care services, providing approximately 10 per cent of healthcare services in Australia. It provides social services and support to more than 450,000 people across Australia each year. It has over 1730 schools enrolling more than 760,000 Australian students.

The ACBC seeks to participate in public debate by making reasoned arguments that can be considered by all people of goodwill.

The ACBC appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to Modern Slavery Bill 2018. The Bill is a very welcome first step in national efforts to eradicate slavery.

Modern slavery

Modern slavery includes "... human trafficking, slavery and slavery like practices such as servitude, forced labour, forced or servile marriage, the sale and exploitation of children, and debt bondage."¹

¹ Walk Free Foundation, *The Case for an Australian Modern Slavery Act*. The Minderoo Foundation Pty Ltd, 2017. Page 4.

Pope Francis is a vocal advocate for the eradication of modern slavery. As the Holy Father says, “... modern slavery — in the form of human trafficking, forced labour, prostitution or the trafficking of organs — is a crime ‘against humanity’. The victims of this are from every walk of life, but most are found among the poorest and the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters.”²

Two years ago the Vatican City State under Pope Francis’s leadership committed to slavery-proof its own supply chains.³

Australians too have a moral imperative to eradicate the injustice of modern slavery. If we know that a person’s human dignity is being harmed in this way, we should do what we can to free them from that ill-treatment.

Australia adopted the goal of eradicating modern slavery, human trafficking and forced labour as one of the nations participating in the unanimous General Assembly vote for the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals on 25 September 2015. This was the very day on which Pope Francis addressed the United Nations General Assembly and spoke about slavery and human trafficking.

Goal 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals commits all UN members to “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”⁴

Pope Francis has been a key advocate of this goal, which seeks eradication of the “atrocious scourge” and the “open wound” of modern slavery in this generation.⁵ National policy should be directed towards this objective.

The Walk Free Foundation’s Global Slavery Index estimates there are more than 45 million people who are victims of modern slavery today, with 4,300 of those people living in Australia.⁶

Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP announced last year to a New South Wales committee investigating human trafficking that the Archdiocese of Sydney would slavery-proof its supply chains.

Archbishop Fisher said the Archdiocese “... will review and revise all relevant contractual and business practice documentation, including the Archdiocese’s Guide for Business Practice, to highlight the church’s commitment to eradicating human trafficking. We will as far as possible only purchase slavery-proofed products and services, and as far as possible only contract with firms who certify that their goods and services are not tainted by human trafficking.”⁷

² Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, Ceremony for the Signing of the Faith Leaders’ Universal Declaration Against Slavery. Casina Pio IV, Tuesday 2 December 2014.

³ Cardinal Pell: Vatican will “slave-proof” supply chain. Vatican Radio, 19 January 2016. See: <http://www.news.va/en/news/cardinal-pell-vatican-will-slave-proof-supply-chai>

⁴ United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. See: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/>

⁵ White, C, ‘Pope Francis, world leader of the modern anti-slavery movement.’ *Crux*, 30 July 2016. See: <https://cruxnow.com/catholic-voices/2016/07/30/chris-white-piece-human-trafficking/>

⁶ See: www.globalslaveryindex.org

⁷ Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP speaking to the NSW Legislative Council’s Select Committee on Human Trafficking. Transcript of the Inquiry into Human Trafficking in New South Wales. Parliament House, Sydney, Tuesday 28 March 2017, page 14.

The Archdiocese has undertaken significant work to this end, developing expertise in this area. This work is significant as the Catholic Church is one of the largest purchasing groups in Australia after government. Australia's Catholic bishops will look to the Archdiocese of Sydney to model how slavery-free supply chains can be achieved.

The bishops acknowledge and appreciate the long-term and expert work of Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) and the Archdiocese of Sydney's Anti-Slavery Taskforce.

A Modern Slavery Act for Australia

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has argued for national modern slavery legislation that includes:

- An independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner with the resources to drive efforts to eradicate modern slavery and hold large organisations accountable;
- A requirement for all large organisations operating in or doing business in Australia – businesses, governments and not-for-profits – to provide an annual public statement on steps they are taking to eradicate slavery from their organisation and supply chains; and
- A central, publicly-accessible repository, to store the annual statements provided by large organisations.

The Modern Slavery Bill is very welcome because it adopts two of those points, setting a requirement for very large organisations to report annually and establishing a central repository of reports. In particular the Government should be congratulated for agreeing to examine its own procurement for slavery tainted goods or services.

The bill provides an important first step in national efforts against slavery, with further work needed to establish an independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner with the resources to drive efforts to eradicate modern slavery and hold large organisations accountable and to introduce human rights due diligence on all public sector procurement, including checking workers in the supply chain have fair pay and conditions.⁸ The three year review of the proposed legislation is welcome as it will allow consideration of how to improve the operation of the law.

Pope Francis makes the comment in another context that “merely technical solutions run the risk of addressing symptoms and not the more serious underlying problems.”⁹ Here Parramatta's Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen, chair of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, makes the pertinent observation that “human trafficking and similar forms of exploitation ... flourish because of society's greed for cheap goods and services and because it is so easy to forget that those who meet these needs are human beings with their own innate God-given dignity.” Yes we need to have reporting mechanisms to help us to eradicate slavery, but we must also look to our own obsession with consumption which, combined with the economic and social exclusion inflicted on vulnerable people on the margins,¹⁰ may drive exploitation.

⁸ Modern Slavery in Supply Chains Reporting Requirement: Submission by the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney to the Australian Attorney-General's Department's Public Consultation. October 2017

⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home*, #144.

¹⁰ Address of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations. UN Headquarters, New York, 25 September 2015.

Conclusion

The Modern Slavery Bill 2018 is a very welcome first step in national efforts against slavery, but further work is needed to establish an independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner with the resources to drive efforts to eradicate modern slavery and hold large organisations accountable and to introduce human rights due diligence on all public sector procurement.

I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have. I can be contacted via Mr Jeremy Stuparich, Public Policy Director at the ACBC on _____ or at _____

Yours sincerely

Bishop Greg O'Kelly SJ

Chairman

Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development