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**Australian Catholic Religious
Against Trafficking in Humans**

News Release ... 26 July 2019

ACRATH urges federal politicians to address human trafficking

Five ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans) members are in Canberra on July 28 and 29 urging Members of Parliament to allocate an Act of Grace payment for 22 workers from Vanuatu who were forced into labour in Queensland in 2014 and have still not been compensated.

ACRATH will also implore Members of Parliament to act on the case of the 22 men from Vanuatu, forced into labour in Australia in 2014. The men were hired by a labour contractor, under the Australian Government's aid program's low-skilled Seasonal Worker Program, to work on farms in Queensland. The labour contractor promised the men a good wage. They were, in most cases, paid nothing and fed little, often relying on the food they picked.

Thirteen of the 22 men received no wages for their work and others were paid a total of \$50 to \$150 each. The men are still owed around \$107,900. Some returned to Vanuatu in debt, having borrowed the money for fares to come to Australia and projected expenses.

"The Federal Court's conviction of the labour hire firm for the exploitation of these 22 workers is an example of vulnerable foreign workers lured to Australia under the Australian Government's Seasonal Worker Program, a part of the Australian aid to the Pacific. ACRATH is aware that the Minister for Finance has in his power to allocate an Act of Grace payment for these exploited workers to the value of \$107,900 and we are calling him to do so," Ms Carolan said.

ACRATH is also calling for the reinstatement of NGO funding for a three to five year cycle in the Home Affairs departmental Budget under the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery. This would enable funded NGOs to undertake their work supporting government initiatives in a transparent, systematic and productive way.

ACRATH's Executive Officer Christine Carolan said the community's generosity in the past year had ensured ACRATH's raft of programs to combat modern day slavery and forced marriage had continued. "But ACRATH's work has been compromised by not receiving Home Affairs funding for the past 12 months. We believe that the occasional and only 12 month ad hoc funding of NGOs makes it difficult for NGOs to achieve their work of crime prevention, advocacy and support of trafficked people. Also, the ad hoc funding of the past two years puts us in competition with other counter trafficking NGOs which is counterproductive," said ACRATH's Executive Officer Christine Carolan.

Ms Carolan said the Canberra advocacy trip was also an opportunity to congratulate the Government on passing the Modern Slavery Act (2018) requiring certain large businesses and the government itself to make annual public reports (Modern Slavery Statements) on their actions to address modern slavery risks in the supply chains of the goods and services they use.

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ACRATH's achievements in the past year with community support include:

- Assisting 28 trafficked women and their 24 children through our Companionship Program, supported by 17 trained volunteers.
- Disseminating forced marriage awareness-raising materials in four states to ACRATH volunteers, marriage celebrants, parents, teachers, school counsellors and student groups in Government, Catholic and Independent schools.
- Partnering with schools and Institutions across Australia to develop a resource supporting the transition to slavery free staffrooms.
- Opening a new office in Perth, supporting girls and women at risk of forced marriage and delivering training.
- Training more than 900 front-line responders across Australia to provide safe intervention and appropriate long term support for women and girls at risk of, or who have experienced, a forced marriage.
- Collaborating with St Vincent's Health Australia to assist hospitals identify and treat trafficked people and 'slavery proof' the goods and services they use.