



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC ANTI-SLAVERY NETWORK (ACAN) MEDIA RELEASE

St Josephine Bakhita Feast Day

8th February 2023

Today Catholics around the world are marking the Feast Day Mass of St Josephine Bakhita - the Patron Saint of South Sudan and Sudan, and the Patron Saint of victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

As we hold in prayer, more than 50 million people worldwide estimated to be in modern slavery, including several thousand, mostly migrant workers, here in Australia, it's timely to remind ourselves that the eradication of modern slavery and pastoral care for victims is a priority for the Catholic Church in Australia.

Five years ago the Archbishop of Sydney, the Most Reverend Anthony Fisher OP, launched the first report of his Diocese's Anti-Slavery Taskforce.

Today, the Australian Catholic Anti-slavery Network (ACAN) has developed and grown under the careful management of the Anti-slavery Taskforce, to the point that ACAN now provides expert support to 90% of Catholic organisations reporting under Australia's Modern Slavery Act.

ACAN annual Modern Slavery Statements required under the Act offer a snapshot of Catholic endeavours to help create what the Holy Father refers to as an 'economy of care'.

In particular,

- a mindset and structures that put people rather than profits at the centre of things
- a commitment to fighting for the common good and not just our personal interests
- a practice of justice, compassion and decency that demonstrates a deep reverence for others
- and the steady implementation of Catholic Social Doctrine



Demand for modern slavery expertise and the ACAN Program is steadily on the rise. ACAN organisations have access to over 70 risk management program tools, resources and deliverables.

The program is delivered by five full time staff, all with expertise covering modern slavery, business and human rights, procurement, supply chains, supplier engagement and remediation.

Archbishop Fisher has expressed his view that through ACAN, “We are being given the means to walk our talk about human dignity in our agencies day to day.”

“We must be intentional about this, not regarding anti-slavery as a tick-a-box exercise in minimalist compliance, but as a defining commitment without which we could not in conscience engage in our many activities; not as something only to trouble the business manager or mission officer, but as everyone’s concern.”

May St Josephine Bakhita guide us all and pray for us in all our work, and pray that modern slavery will be ended in our generation.

John McCarthy KC GCPO KCSG
Chair, Sydney Archdiocesan Anti-Slavery Taskforce
Australian Ambassador to the Holy See (2012-2016)
Australian Catholic Anti-slavery Network acan.org.au

The story of St Josephine Bakhita is available [here](#) and the Prayer Card is available to download [here](#).