



Global Leaders Convene in Rome to Combat Modern Slavery

23 Nov 2023 - The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and the Australian Embassy to the Holy See recently partnered with Walk Free and the Global Freedom Network to convene a modern slavery event in Rome. The event brought together leading academics, faith leaders, civil society members, ambassadors, and survivors to discuss the latest findings in modern slavery research. It also addressed the role of faith and faith leaders in responding to modern slavery.

Dr Martijn Boersma, Associate Professor of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) attended the event. UNDA is the only university in Australia that offers post-graduate courses on modern slavery and human trafficking. “It’s important that the event considered how business and management practices are connected to modern slavery – including in the supply chains and operations of Catholic organisations. I was pleased to share with attendees how the Australian Catholic Anti-slavery Network (ACAN) is addressing modern slavery,” said Dr Boersma.

Alison Rahill from ACAN was the opening speaker of the RENATE Europe Network (Religious in Europe Networking against Trafficking and Exploitation) online conference that took place over three days. RENATE Europe Network is comprised of over 300 members and 40 Religious congregations, many of whom are engaged in education, healthcare & services provision. Ms Rahill spoke about opportunities for Catholic leadership and global collaboration to assess, address and mitigate the risk of modern slavery in Church operations and supply chains.

“Ms. Rahill has inspired us to pursue best practices and that we all have a part to play in the journey towards eradicating any traces of slavery and exploitation from faith-based operations,” said Anne Kelleher from RENATE.

RENAME’s conference speakers also included Ms. Martina Liebsch, MD German Bishops Conference on the topic of “Action Plan on Human Trafficking, with a focus on Supply Chains” and Professor Alexander Trautrim, Professor of Supply Chain Management, Nottingham University Business School, UK on the topic “Modern Slavery; SDG 8.7 & what we can do in our Supply Chains.”

Modern slavery refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power.

Pope Francis has referred to modern slavery and human trafficking as crimes against humanity. In his 2015 *Laudato si’* encyclical he condemns the commodification of human beings and the exploitation of vulnerable populations, emphasizing the ethical responsibility to protect the dignity and rights of every person. Pope Francis urges a collective response that upholds human dignity and challenges the economic systems that contribute to the exploitation of people.