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Anti-trafficking advocates call on MPs in Parliament

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ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans) members from WA, NSW and Victoria, will walk the halls of Parliament House for four days this week (September 4-7), urging MPs to do more to combat human trafficking in Australia.

It is the 12th year the ACRATH members have taken the case to politicians from all parties and their advocacy trips have resulted in significant changes to the way trafficked people are supported in Australia.

“ACRATH advocates are keen to engage with MPs about our current issues: forced marriage, a Modern Slavery Act for Australia, and funding for NGOs. We are used to getting a good hearing from the dozens of MPs we meet each year; we really appreciate the bipartisan support for our policy work and the sense of this being a genuine collaboration between government and civil society,” said ACRATH’s Executive Officer Christine Carolan.

The meetings between ACRATH and MPs come at a pivotal time. In July the Justice Minister, Michael Keenan, announced a \$125,000 grant to ACRATH. Last month Minister Keenan, in a statement, said: “I am pleased to announce that the Government proposes to introduce legislation that will make it a requirement for large businesses to report annually on their actions to address modern slavery.”

The legislation is likely to put pressure on large companies to slavery-proof their supply chains. Already, St Vincent’s Health Australia and other companies and organisations have embarked on this work.

The ACRATH group, including Catholic Sisters and Brothers, will meet with 41 politicians, including Minister Keenan, and ask MPs to:

- introduce a pilot scheme providing services and accommodation for all young people facing forced marriage in Australia, regardless of their willingness or ability to testify against the person forcing them to marry.
- support the introduction of a Modern Slavery Act into Australia – one that ensures the supply chain of goods brought into Australia is slavery-free;
- establish an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

The ACRATH group, including members from WA, NSW and Vic, has had some serious wins in the past 12 years. The annual visit, linked to network partners’ advocacy, has led to improved visas and services for people trafficked into Australia.

The advocacy group will also meet with Catholic agencies and departmental officers and staff from the Philippines and Timor Leste Embassies.

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