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People are NOT for sale

ACRATH News

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans

November 2026



Take Action Against Gender Based Violence

Human trafficking and modern slavery are violations of dignity, freedom and human rights. According to the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, approximately 50 million people worldwide are living in conditions of modern slavery. Of these, 27.6 million are subjected to forced labour, while 22 million are living in situations of forced marriage. Women, children and migrants are disproportionately affected, with women and girls accounting for 54% of all victims of forced marriage.

This is a global crisis that demands our attention, our advocacy and our action.

From 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day, people and organisations around the world will unite for the **16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence**. This United Nations annual campaign is an opportunity to raise awareness, challenge injustice and take meaningful steps towards ending violence and exploitation.

ACRATH invites you to join us throughout these 16 days as we work alongside organisations and communities around the world to **Ensure Justice, Protect Survivors and End Impunity**. Together, we can amplify the voices of victim/survivors, advocate for stronger protections, and challenge the systems that allow human trafficking, modern slavery and gender-based violence to persist.

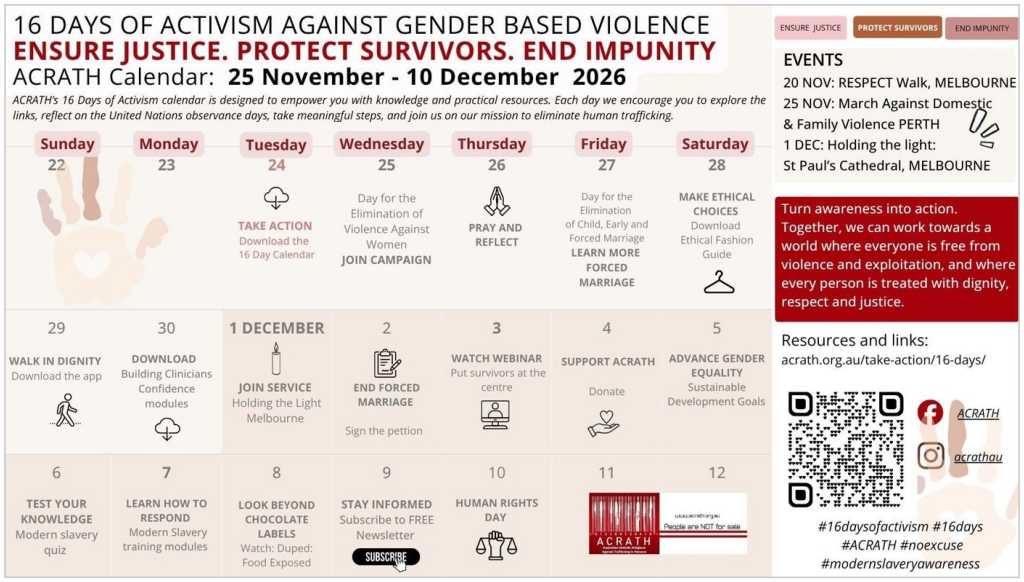
Get involved: Learn, share and take action

You can be part of the change. Download ACRATH's **16 Days of Activism Calendar**, created to inspire action and deepen understanding throughout the campaign. The calendar marks the United Nations observance days, provides daily learning opportunities, along with links to valuable resources, key events, and information.

Continued on page 2

Take Action Against Gender Based Violence continued from page 1

Explore the calendar and discover how you can make a difference at: https://acrath.org.au/take-action/16-days/



Every action matters. Whether you share information, participate in campaign activities, raise awareness in your community or advocate for stronger protections, your contribution can help build a world where exploitation is challenged, survivors are supported, and perpetrators are held accountable.

Turn awareness into action with us, not just during these 16 days, but throughout the year. Together, we can work towards a world where everyone is free from violence and exploitation, and where every person is treated with dignity, respect and justice.

Now is the time to act. Join ACRATH and be part of the change.

A Different Kind of Social Work

For Master of Social Work (Qualifying) student Trinity Jones, a placement with ACRATH opened her eyes to a different side of social work, one focused not on direct client support, but on advocacy, research and systemic change. During her placement, Trinity explored how social workers can influence policy, challenge injustice and help protect the dignity and rights of people affected by human trafficking and modern slavery. The experience culminated in a week of advocacy in Canberra, where she helped plan and facilitate meetings with politicians, ministers and government representatives. It was an opportunity to see how social work can create change on a broader scale, and one that has reshaped her understanding of the profession and her future career.

“Having a student on placement was another great way for ACRATH and Australian Catholic University to partner together in our shared mission to uphold human dignity. We are grateful for the gifts that Trinity Jones has brought to our team, and for the opportunity to contribute to the formation of a fantastic future social worker.”

Sr Sarah Puls, ACRATH Executive Officer

Read Trinity’s story via the ACU website: https://www.impact.acu.edu.au/Career-and-development/A-different-kind-of-social-work



Pictured: Parliament House Canberra L – R: Marg Leahy, Therese Hussey, Trinity Jones, Sr Annette Arnold RSJ, Sr Noelene Simmons SM, Sr Sarah Puls SGS and Ange Hart

Trauma-informed healthcare insights on global stage

The work of ACRATH and St Vincent's Health Australia (SVHA) in developing healthcare responses to modern slavery was recently shared on the global stage at the 8th United Nations Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum in Bangkok.

ACRATH Community Development Project Officer, Melissa Halliday, and SVHA Modern Slavery Liaison Officer, Group Procurement Specialist – Environment, Social and Governance, Tarang Jain, co-hosted a session called *"Forced, Tricked or Trapped" to "Seen, Safe, Supported".*



Pictured: ACRATH Community Development Project Officer, Melissa Halliday, and SVHA Modern Slavery Liaison Officer, Tarang Jain, in Bangkok, September 2026

The only healthcare-focused presentation offered at the forum, the session highlighted the importance of a survivor-led, trauma-informed approach to identifying exploitation in all sectors.

"Modern slavery survivors don't announce themselves – they show up in emergency rooms, on factory floors and in supply chains, hidden in plain sight until it's too late," Mr Jain told participants.

"Survivor-informed identification tools work equally well in a hospital ward as a factory floor."

Ms Halliday said the session received a positive response, particularly the emphasis on involving survivors in the design of training modules and tools.

"There was a lot of talk about grievance mechanisms at the conference...we tried to highlight that if mechanisms are not survivor-centred or responsive to the realities of exploitation, they may fail to identify modern slavery within operations and supply chains," she said.

"In our experience, once the healthcare clinicians had training, they were seeing it so much more – in the project pilot, there was a 400 per cent increase in identifications once training and support was given."



Ms Halliday said the benefits of ACRATH's participation in the three-day forum, which was attended by more than 1,400 delegates from businesses and NGOs across Asia, were twofold.

"It was an opportunity to show how the principles, training and tools we used and developed for the project can be applied in a broader context," she said.

"And it was also a chance to participate in various sessions over the three days and see how Australia's anti-slavery efforts are perceived at a regional and global level.

"Discussions and sessions covered mandatory human rights due diligence, worker rights, how to recognise forced labour in complicated supply chains and the ongoing need to reframe ethical business practices as advantageous opportunities rather than burdensome for a business.

"One thing that came through several sessions was that there is a real opportunity for businesses to work alongside local NGOs to help strengthen worker rights – it reinforced the importance of cross-sector collaboration."

Continued on page 4

Trauma-informed healthcare insights on global stage continued from page 3

Ms Halliday said she was pleased to be able to reconnect with Tomoyo Obokata, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery who had visited Australia two years ago, in the earlier stages of the project, to meet with SVHA and ACRATH to discuss the importance of a healthcare response to modern slavery, and who subsequently attended the healthcare session in Bangkok in September.

Following the international forum, ACRATH continues to explore ways to further develop cross-sector collaboration in Australia and is hosting a national forum in early February, in collaboration with SVHA and the NSW Office of the Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

The forum is aimed at people with lived experience of modern slavery, health executives, clinicians, emergency staff, maternity carers, social workers, GPs, anti-slavery and intersecting community support services, unions and government representatives.

Recognise, Respond, Refer: Healthcare-led responses to modern slavery will be held on **February 2, 2027, 9.30 am to 3.30 pm** at the Catholic Leadership Centre, 576 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne.

For more information, see https://acrath.org.au/healthcare-response-to-modern-slavery/

To find out about sponsorship for people with lived experience of modern slavery, email Ms Halliday at awareness@acrath.org.au before December 30.

ACRATH Members Advocate in the West

ACRATH members Sr Frances Hayes and Therese Hussey met with Mr Tom French MP, Federal Member for Moore in Western Australia, in October, to discuss key advocacy requests raised during ACRATH's visit to Canberra in August.

The meeting provided an opportunity to share ACRATH's work and advocate for stronger support for victim/survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery. Discussions focused on the need for a **National Compensation Scheme** to ensure fair and timely restitution for victims and survivors, and extending Medicare access to PALM scheme workers.

Mr French was receptive to the issues raised and listened attentively to the concerns, recognising the importance of measures that promote justice, dignity and wellbeing.



Pictured: ACRATH members Sr Frances Hayes and Therese Hussey with Mr Tom French MP, Federal Member for Moore

This meeting is another important step in ACRATH's ongoing advocacy to strengthen protections and improve outcomes for people affected by human trafficking and exploitation.

Human Trafficking Awareness at the United Nations General Assembly

ACRATH Executive Officer Sr Sarah Puls SGS joined Sr Gertrude Elelegu at the United Nations General Assembly session, *Catholic Sisters on the Frontlines: Scaling Local Leadership in Development*.



Pictured: Sr Sarah Puls SGS with Sr Gertrude Elelegu at the United Nations General Assembly.

They spoke with Devex co-founder and Executive Vice President Alan Robbins about the vital role of locally rooted organisations in combating human trafficking. “The main message that we were trying to get out there was that it’s so important to engage with people who are already in the communities that you’re trying to serve,” Sarah said.

Read more about Sr Sarah and Sr Gertrude’s time in New York and awareness-raising featured in:

The Good Oil:
UN gathering: An opportunity to highlight action against human trafficking

America Magazine:
Catholic sisters bring fight to end human trafficking to U.N. General Assembly

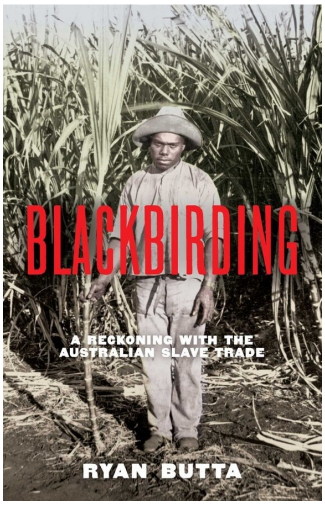

UN gathering an opportunity to highlight action against human trafficking


THE WEEKLY DISPATCH

Catholic sisters bring fight to end human trafficking to U.N. General Assembly

by Kevin Clarke September 25, 2026

Australia had abolished slavery. So how did we justify ‘blackbirding’?



ACRATH Community Development Officer Joseph Dunn reviewed the new release *Blackbirding: A reckoning with the Australian slave trade*, by Ryan Butta, Simon & Schuster.

“A major theme throughout the book is captured in a phrase Butta borrows from Tracey Banivanua-Mar: ‘engineered forgetting’. It describes a conscious effort to excise a group of people from history. That may sound conspiratorial, but Butta shows that the process is often much more mundane. For those whose reputations depend on forgetting, it involves sanitising the facts, emphasising the good and excising the bad. Equally insidious, however, are those who simply neglect the truth: a report left unreleased, a petition unanswered, a law unenforced or an injustice ignored.”

Read the full review published in Eureka Street: Australia had abolished slavery. So how did we justify ‘blackbirding’?

Celebrating 20 Years of Music for Justice

On AFL Grand Final weekend in Melbourne this September, music and sport lovers had plenty to celebrate. While Kylie Minogue may have captured the headlines, acclaimed Australian opera singer Merlyn Quaife AM, accompanied by pianist Andrea Katz, was sharing her remarkable gift of music for a cause near to her heart. Together, they presented Merlyn's final benefit concert in support of ACRATH, bringing opera lovers and social justice supporters together for a memorable occasion. This concert marked the culmination of more than 20 years of Merlyn's generous and creative support for ACRATH's work.



Pictured: Left to right, Roger Heagney (composer), Andrea Katz (pianist), Merlyn Quaife (singer), Sunny, and Stancea Vichie

The story began more than two decades ago, when Merlyn visited ACRATH at the Good Shepherd office in Abbotsford, its first headquarters. There, she met with Victorian member Sr Stancea Vichie to discuss and learn more about human trafficking and modern slavery.

"Merlyn was keen to support ACRATH and discussed various ways she could volunteer her time and skills," Stancea recalls.

Recognising that Merlyn's exceptional musical talents could make a difference beyond the office, Stancea suggested that she use her vocal talents. Merlyn took the idea to heart, finding a way to combine her passion for music with her devotion to social justice. And so began an exceptional partnership that has spanned more than two decades.

Through fundraising concerts, musical collaborations and the generosity of fellow artists, Merlyn has helped support ACRATH's mission to eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery, raise public awareness and support change. Her contribution has helped sustain ACRATH's important work during a span of significant developments in Australia, including the introduction of legislation criminalising forced marriage in 2013 and the passage of the Modern Slavery Act in 2018.

Continued on page 7

Celebrating 20 Years of Music for Justice continued from page 6

Music with a purpose

Merlyn's first fundraising project for ACRATH was a collaboration with pianist, composer and conductor Roger Heagney. The result was *Fortune My Foe*, a 2010 CD featuring poetry by Graeme Ellis set to music composed by Heagney. Produced by the ABC and released by Move Records, the recording brought together artistic expression and a pledge to social justice.

Pianist Andrea Katz has been another integral part of Merlyn's musical path with ACRATH, accompanying her throughout the years. Their collaboration, alongside the generosity of other artists who donated their time and talents, helped make the fundraising concerts possible. Many were held in the welcoming home of two of Merlyn's friends, whose hospitality further demonstrated the community ethos behind this effort.

The story of *Fortune My Foe* and the concerts that followed is a striking reminder that there are many ways to offer to a cause. By sharing their gifts, skills and connections, artists can help bring important social issues into the public eye and turn generosity into meaningful action.

An outstanding career, a lasting contribution

Merlyn's support for ACRATH is just one dimension of a distinguished musical career. Her extensive experience spans opera, oratorio, Lieder, chamber music and contemporary music, with performances throughout Australia and Europe. She has also made a significant contribution to music education as Associate Professor of Classical Voice at Monash University, alongside her academic work at both the University of Melbourne and Monash University.

ACRATH extends its true gratitude to Merlyn for more than 20 years of creative generosity, service and advocacy. Her willingness to use her talent to raise funds and awareness has made a lasting contribution to ACRATH's work and demonstrated the power of combining personal passion with a commitment toward justice.

Reflecting on Merlyn's contribution, Stancea said: "Merlyn's unique skills, devotion and ability are a wonderful good news story on how to support a cause using initiative, existing talented and willing contacts, such as pianist Andrea Katz, and an 'outside-the-box' approach. ACRATH is certainly fortunate to have had her support and voice for so many years."

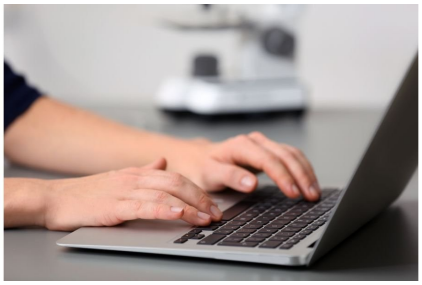
As Merlyn concludes this chapter of her fundraising journey, ACRATH celebrates not only the music she has shared, but also the compassion, creativity and commitment behind it. Her story is an uplifting example of how each of us can contribute to a more just world by offering what we do best.

Thank you, Merlyn, Andrea and all the artists and supporters who have helped make more than 20 years of music for justice possible. Your generosity has helped ACRATH continue its vital work towards a world free from human trafficking and modern slavery.

To learn more about Merlyn Quaife and purchase a copy of *Fortune My Foe*, visit merlynquaife.com.

To discover how you can support ACRATH, become a member or use your own skills and talents to be a voice for justice, visit ACRATH – Take Action.

Modern Slavery in the News



Ethical Fashion Guide – Baptist World Aid Australia
https://baptistworldaid.org.au/resources/ethical-fashion-guide/

Australia's modern slavery reforms must go further, Commissioner says
https://www.antislaverycommissioner.gov.au/news/australias-modern-slavery-reforms-must-go-further-commissioner-says

In Australia, groups collaborate to fight human trafficking and to support survivors
https://www.globalsistersreport.org/columns/trafficking/australia-groups-collaborate-fight-human-trafficking-and-support-survivors

Understanding modern slavery in healthcare settings
https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/legal-and-justice/anti-slavery-commissioner/understanding-modern-slavery-in-healthcare-settings.pdf

He told us we were slaves – The fight for justice on a Scottish fishing trawler
https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvg7d83nl7no

Melbourne man Chee Kit Chong jailed for at least four years for slavery offences
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-09-04/vic-slavery-sentence-chee-kit-chong/107114990

Welcoming the Stranger: A reflection on EU Anti-Trafficking Day
https://www.talithakum.info/en/news/welcoming-the-stranger-a-reflection-on-eu-anti-trafficking-day/

Climate change becoming a major driver of child marriage across Asia and the Pacific
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-07-10/climate-change-leading-to-more-child-marriages-advocates-say/106766756

PALM scheme workers receive nearly $160,000 in refunds following LHA investigations into substandard accommodation
https://www.labourhireauthority.vic.gov.au/latest-news/palm-scheme-workers-receive-nearly-160-000-in-refunds-following-lha-investigations-into-substandard-accommodation/

Former Queensland labour hire provider and manager penalised for false records
https://www.fairwork.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/2026-media-releases/august-2026/20260819-korserv-penalty-media-release

Stop Trafficking Newsletter
https://alliancetoendhumantrafficking.org/stop-trafficking-newsletter/

MECPATHS – Learn more about Child Trafficking in Ireland
https://mecpaths.com/

> *"...it might — or, unfortunately, might not — be surprising how often someone in one of our seminars is unaware that modern slavery is not confined to overseas countries. It is in our supply chains and our economy, and is very much an Australian phenomenon...some of the methods used to disguise and legitimise exploitation have a long history here."*
>
> **Joseph Dunn, ACRATH Community Development Worker**

ACRATH needs core business funding and additional funding for special projects.

Please consider a regular donation to ACRATH so that we can plan ahead. Thanks.

https://www.trybooking.com/au/donate/acrath
or https://acrath.org.au/donate

Donations of $2 or more are tax deductible

Level 5, 250 Victoria Parade

East Melbourne 3002

PO Box 243, East Melbourne 8002

www.acrath.org.au

office@acrath.org.au

03 9645 5986