

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Why is this a priority for the Catholic Church?

A key principle of Catholic Social Teaching is the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of life. Each person is loved by God and is of inherent worth. Modern slavery is a complete rejection of the dignity of the human person. For this reason, eliminating human trafficking and empowering survivors has been a long-term concern of the Catholic Church.

Pope John Paul, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have each called for and written about the need to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking. The Sydney Archdiocese has also shown strong leadership and Archbishop Fisher has established an Anti-Slavery Taskforce and made the following statement:

“I take as my starting point that all decent Australians regard as abhorrent human trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices such as forced labour or forced marriage, and domestic, sexual or other servitude....We would all want to know the extent to which such practices are occurring in our State and to see them eradicated, and we would all want to ensure that no activity within our State contributes to those practices elsewhere.

But it is not enough for groups such as churches to lecture or exhort the rest of the community in such matters. We must demonstrate our own willingness to act where we can. The Vatican has already committed itself to slavery- proofing all its procurement practices and supply lines. It is no small task to ensure that everything we use has been obtained ethically, that everything we obtain has itself been produced and supplied ethically and sustainably, and that those upon whom we rely or with whom we are affiliated are like-minded. It is no small task but we must try. As Pope Francis has pointed out, buying goods is not just a commercial matter; it has moral dimensions.

I will also ask my priests to preach and faithful to pray, do penance, educate themselves and their peers, and lobby and vote for justice in this domain. I also undertake to cooperate with our civic leaders to assist in every way we can to address this major social justice issue. Regarding contemporary slavery, Pope Francis has asked if our generation is simply going to look away. There he echoed William Wilberforce, who said to civic and church leaders, “You may do nothing about it, but at least now you cannot say you do not know.” I have great confidence we will do far more than nothing about this great evil.

Address by Archbishop Fisher to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council of New South Wales on Human Trafficking – Parliament House, 28 March 2017

Useful links

Archdiocese of Sydney - <https://www.sydneycatholic.org/directory/listing/anti-slavery-taskforce>

Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network <https://www.acan.org.au>

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans <https://acrath.org.au>

Justice and Peace Office <https://justiceandpeace.org.au/anti-slavery-and-counter-trafficking/>

Anti-slavery Australia - <https://antislavery.org.au>

International Justice Mission. <https://ijm.org.au>