

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans

ACRATH stands for **Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans** and there is usually a members' gathering and annual meeting every year. However, due to COVID-19, they were unable to meet face to face for the last four years. This year ACRATH members, staff, and the National Committee gathered for a three-day conference from the 19th to 21st March at St Joseph's, Baulkham Hills, New South Wales. This was the perfect setting for discussions on the pressing issue of their chosen subject of modern slavery, the theme being: Modern Slavery is Closer than You Think. I was blessed to be able to join them.

Before the conference, some of us who were 'companion members' had a two days' training workshop about Self Care and Understanding Trauma Experience by Colleen Jackson RSC. Since we are working with the survivors, it helps us to understand those who have had traumatic experiences in their life and how to deal with and accompany them.

During the conference, we were addressed by Fr Peter O'Neill SSC, who is the Columban Regional Director of Oceania and ACRATH's representative on the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme Agriculture Committee. He shared with us about the exploitation of seasonal workers in the agriculture sector. The eligible businesses can recruit workers for short-term jobs for up to 9 months or long-term roles for between 1 and 4 years in unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled positions. Seasonal workers come to Australia mainly from the Pacific and Timor Leste. They come to earn, but unfortunately some of them face many difficulties such as language barrier, cultural differences etc. and are forced to work for small wages. ACRATH tries to help and support them in many ways.

Dr James Cockayne, Anti-Slavery Commissioner NSW, along with Pacific / Australia Labour Mobility Transition Branch Assistant Secretary, Cary Duffy, spoke about modern slavery prevention. Dr James shared that over 1900 people in Australia are victims of modern slavery but only 1 in 5 victims of slavery are identified. That means that 80% of victims do not get the support they need and remain in slavery in Australia. Those most at risk are women, children, refugees and people seeking asylum; migrants, and those occupations with low visibility or legal protection.

Asha Ramzan, of the Sydney Community Forum, shared about International Students. She spoke about how international students are vulnerable here in Australia. Many international students are exploited as sex workers and/or forced labour.

In conclusion, this Members' gathering and annual meeting was an unforgettable memory and experience that I shared with all its members around Australia. It strengthened me and my attitude towards helping the people who are in need in our society.



ACRATH members

Sr Martina with some of
ACRATH members

Sr Martina Htoo
August 2024

*"Human trafficking is an open wound
on the body of contemporary society,
a scourge upon the body of Christ.
It is a crime against humanity."*

- Pope Francis

