Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Media Release

Human Trafficking – Be Informed about its reality and consequences

ACBC Media Release

On the Feast of St Josephine Bakhita today, 8 February, bishops and religious leaders across Australia support the call from Pope Francis to end the injustice of human trafficking against all people, in particular children.

'They are children! Not slaves!' is the theme for Bakhita Day this year. Pope Francis has designated today a world day of prayer, reflection and action against human trafficking.

St Bakhita is the Patron Saint for victims of slavery. The United Nations estimates that one in every three victims of human trafficking is a child. It is estimated that 30 million children have lost their childhood through sexual exploitation over the past 30 years. Annually, millions of children are trafficked into domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, pornography production, forced marriage, illegal adoption, forced labour, and to become child soldiers.

The bishops of Australia and religious leaders call for a fourfold commitment to: prevention, victim protection, the legal prosecution of perpetrators, and partnerships for change. This commitment starts at home by raising awareness and preventing exploitation of children in all aspects of Australian society. Bishop Terry Brady, Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life said, 'St Josephine Bakhita's feast day is an opportunity to raise awareness about human trafficking involving children. Pope Francis has called us to make a difference. Sometimes our steps are small, but together we can achieve a great deal especially when we work with others to stop human trafficking'.

Sr Anne Tormey rsm, President of the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) said, 'This day can be an opportunity to learn about trafficking locally and globally, to advocate for legislation and pray for the protection of children who become victims of human trafficking'.

St Josephine Bakhita died on 8 February 1947. She was born in Southern Sudan in 1869 and kidnapped for slavery in Sudan and Italy. After regaining her freedom, Josephine Bakhita dedicated her life to sharing her story and to supporting the poor and suffering. Later, she became a Canossian Sister and was canonised in 2000. Today's statement supports a global movement declared by Pope Francis three years ago and known as the Worldwide Network of Religious Life against Trafficking in Persons.