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**News Release: 31 January 2019**

## 8 February 2019 - World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking – time to end slavery

Pope Francis has declared the feast of St Josephine Bakhita, which is celebrated each year on 8<sup>th</sup> February to be the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking. St Josephine Bakhita is the patron saint of victims of slavery and of Sudan. Australians are being urged to work together, through grass roots action and corporate governance, to end slavery around the world.

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH), Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) and Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) are inviting Catholics to mark St Bakhita Day on February 8 2019, and at weekend Masses on February 9 and 10.

ACRATH, CRA and ACBC join the call for a fourfold commitment to: slavery prevention, victim protection, legal prosecution of perpetrators, and partnerships for change. This commitment begins with awareness raising and action to eliminate slavery in all its forms at a diocesan, parish, school, family and personal level.

These organisations have applauded the many people who fought hard for a decade to see gains made in 2018 with the passing in Federal Parliament of the Modern Slavery Act, which came into effect on January 1, 2019. The first modern slavery statements are due on 30 June 2020.

ACRATH's President Sr Noelene Simmons sm said the Modern Slavery Act requires organisations with a consolidated revenue of A\$100 million, or more, to report annually on the risks of modern slavery in their operations and supply chains.

“Ten years ago, ACRATH began working with schools and parishes, urging them to buy and eat only slavery-free chocolate at Easter. We still work on that campaign but we know that slavery is part of so many of the goods and services we use and until we slavery-proof all our supply chains people will be forced to live in slavery,” Sr Noelene said.

CRA President Sr Monica Cavanagh rsj said the Modern Slavery Act was an opportunity for companies to be better global citizens because companies will have to release publicly available reports on their progress in slavery-proofing supply chains. Consumers can then exert some pressure on companies not doing enough, or support those who are doing well.

“This special day gives us an opportunity to reflect on what we do and what we buy and if necessary, to commit to act differently in order to work towards the elimination of slavery,” Sr Monica said.

It is estimated that millions of women, girls, men and boys are trafficked annually into domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, pornography production, forced marriage and forced labour.

“These forms of exploitation flourish because of society’s greed for cheap goods and services and because it is easy to forget that those who meet these needs are human beings with their own innate God-given dignity,” the Bishop of Parramatta, Vincent Long Van Nguyen, wrote in ACSJC & ACRATH publication No 79. Bishop Long is Chairman of the ACBC’s Bishops Commission for Social Justice - Mission and Service.

ACRATH, CARITAS Australia and Talitha Kum, to mark this day, have developed parish, school and community resources, including prayers, homily notes, school exercises for all age groups and parish bulletin notices. A calendar of events to mark the World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking and the feast day of St Josephine Bakhita can be found, along with resources, at <https://acrath.org.au/take-action/world-day-of-prayer-against-human-trafficking/>

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