




SOCIAL POLICY POSITION STATEMENT



MODERN SLAVERY

A blurred photograph of a crowded garment factory. In the foreground, a woman is seated at a sewing machine, working on a piece of fabric. The machine is white and mounted on a stand. To her right, there is a yellow bin filled with fabric scraps. In the background, other workers are visible, some standing and some seated at machines. The overall scene is busy and industrial, with a focus on the workers and their environment.

"The victims of this are from every walk of life, but most are found among the poorest and the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters."

Pope Francis' declaration on International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, 2 December 2014



INTRODUCTION

We first became aware of the horror and tragedy of human trafficking from the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Cabrini Sisters) in 2005.

The Cabrini Sisters were one of the early members of UNANIMA, a coalition of congregations of religious sisters formed in 2002 to advocate at the UN for the rights of women and children, particularly those living in extreme poverty. Through UNANIMA's work, we began to understand how we can unwittingly contribute to the global problem of modern slavery through uninformed purchasing, and that each of us has a role to play in stopping the exploitation.

That year, eliminating human trafficking was adopted as one of our three social justice causes. We started by promoting awareness of the issue amongst our staff, encouraging them to think about their purchasing practices, and considering our own supply chain. We also provided practical support to services in Australia working with victims of human trafficking.

In 2014, we introduced a new group procurement policy that enshrined our commitment to ethical sourcing. We began seeking Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) assurances from some of our suppliers for goods sourced or distributed from countries where slavery is an issue. BSCI is a supply chain management system designed to drive social compliance and improvements in factories and farms in global supply chains by implementing the principle of international labour standards protecting workers' rights. The policy also encouraged purchasing from social enterprises or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, as a practical expression of our commitment to reconciliation with Australia's First Peoples.

We welcomed the passing of Australia's Modern Slavery Act in 2018 and the new statutory reporting requirement that is entailed. We recommit to playing our part in eradicating all forms of modern slavery.

MODERN SLAVERY IN CONTEXT

Slavery has existed in all societies across the world throughout history.

Sadly, the Transatlantic Slave Trade is likely the most familiar to us. It lasted for more than 400 years and saw millions of Africans captured, sold and transported to the Caribbean and the Americas, where they were forced to work for no pay, in inhumane conditions.

Perhaps for some, the slavery that existed in Australia is less well known.

From the time of colonisation in the late 18th century, thousands of Australia's indigenous peoples have been forced to work for no money or only basic rations. Right up until the 1970's, colonial and state laws gave governments an extraordinary level of control over every aspect of the lives of indigenous peoples including where they lived, where they worked and how much they were paid.

In the mid-19th century, the development of the sugar industry and concurrent loss of the compliant convict workforce when convict transportation ceased created a labour crisis. European settlers, drawing on the experience of the flourishing Transatlantic Slave Trade, lured or forcibly transported Pacific Islanders to Australia where they were indentured, bonded and paid a pittance for their work.

In the early 20th century, under the White Australia policy, most were forcibly repatriated to their home country, even though many were British Subjects and entitled to remain in Australia.

It is a confronting reality that slavery is not a thing of the past. Even in the present day, adults and children all over the world are victims of modern slavery.

Modern slavery is an umbrella term that encompasses any situations of exploitation where a person cannot refuse or leave work because of threats of violence, coercion, abuse of power or deception. It encompasses slavery, servitude, the worst forms of child labour, forced labour, human trafficking, debt bondage, slavery-like practices, forced marriage and deceptive recruiting for labour or services.

According to the 2018 Global Slavery Index, an estimated 40.3 million people were enslaved across the world in 2016. Of these people, 71% were female and 29% were male; 15.4 million were in forced marriage, and 24.9 million were in forced labour.

That same year, it was estimated there were nearly 25 million victims of modern slavery in the Asia Pacific region.



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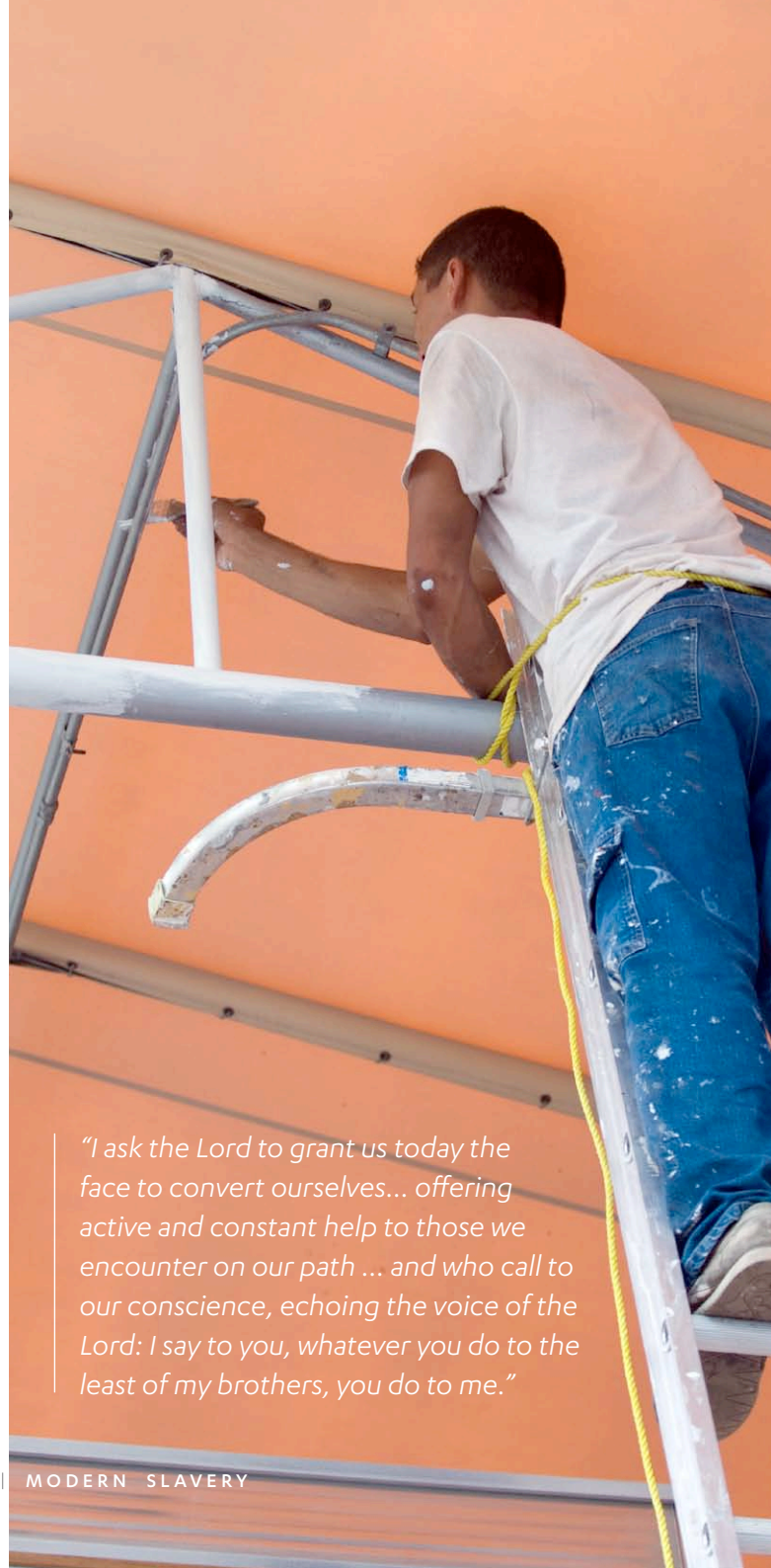
Modern slavery is a persistent issue in Asia Pacific with similar drivers of vulnerability seen elsewhere in the world, that is, poverty and economic insecurity, migration and displacement, weak governance and cultural norms that allow for discrimination and violence against women and children.¹

Unfortunately, Australia and New Zealand are not immune from modern slavery.

The 2018 Global Slavery Index reported that on any given day in 2016, there were an estimated 15,000 people living in modern slavery conditions in Australia. Industries at risk of forced labour exploitation are agriculture, construction, domestic work, meat processing, cleaning, hospitality and food services. Many of the victims were migrant workers who entered Australia on working holiday visas, Seasonal Worker program visas, international student visas and skilled temporary “457” visas who were paid well below the minimum wage with some also in working conditions that could amount to forced labour.

Before we take comfort in the knowledge the number of victims in Australia is relatively low, that same year Australia imported nearly \$12 billion worth of goods ‘at risk’ of being made using slavery such as electronics, clothes, fish, cocoa and even trafficked organs.

¹ Walk Free ‘Murky Waters A qualitative assessment of modern slavery in the Pacific Region’ (March 2020)



“I ask the Lord to grant us today the face to convert ourselves... offering active and constant help to those we encounter on our path ... and who call to our conscience, echoing the voice of the Lord: I say to you, whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me.”

OUR RESPONSE

Our Catholic identity and Cabrini heritage inform our view of the world and influence our response.

Catholic social doctrine teaches us that every person is of infinite value and worth, as each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. Every life is a gift from God and is sacred. It deserves to be protected and nurtured.

Because we are all children of God, we are responsible for one another. Therefore we seek to understand other people's situations and struggles and to make decisions that preference the needs of the poorest, most vulnerable or marginalised.

Each of us has a responsibility to work for social structures, systems and institutions that enable every person to meet their needs and reach their potential. We must fight against the violation and degradation of our brothers and sisters. The measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.²

Eliminating human trafficking has been a historic concern of the Catholic Church. It has been a particular priority for Pope Francis since the beginning of his pontificate.

In March 2014, Pope Francis reminded us it is not possible to remain indifferent before the knowledge that human beings are being bought and sold like goods.³ Later that year, on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, he said that a discriminating relationship that does not respect the fundamental conviction that the 'other is like me myself' constitutes a crime, and very often an abhorrent crime.⁴

Equally, the Missionary Sisters' have had a historical commitment to marginalised people.

Their founding document states: "As Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we must be open to all people because Jesus welcomed all and gave Himself for all. He showed a special predilection for the displaced, for "little ones" and for marginal peoples in His efforts to bring all to communion in the same God."⁵

Today, the missionary endeavours, in the centres the Sisters sponsor throughout the world, to keep pace with the demands of those trapped in new categories of poverty, while maintaining a continuity of spirit that is personal and life-giving in its approach.⁶ In particular, this includes standing in solidarity with the victims of human trafficking in the countries where the Sisters are present as well as around the globe.

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

³ Pope Francis Message on the occasion of the annual Lenten "Fraternity Campaign" in Brazil with the theme of "Fraternity and human trafficking," March 5, 2014

⁴ Pope Francis Declaration on International Day for the Abolition of Slavery 2 December 2014

⁵ MSC Constitutions 17

⁶ MSC Corporate Stance

Consistent with the MSC Corporate Stance on Human Trafficking, we pledge to:

- Condemn the use of violence, abduction, fraud, deception, coercion, or debt bondage to transport people, particularly women and children, from their homes for prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labour, and/or real or virtual slavery.
- Educate ourselves and others regarding the prevalence, causes, and solutions to the worldwide trafficking of women and children.
- Work together with UNANIMA and other non-government organisations, with Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans (ACRATH) and other religious congregations and advocacy groups to prevent trafficking, to eliminate its root causes, to identify it when we see it and to provide alternatives to people who have already been in or are in danger of being trafficked.

We call all people of good will to give their strong support and join in the action against modern slavery in all its forms.





Cabrini's commitment to playing our part in eradicating all forms of modern slavery is shared and supported by Cabrini Outreach.

"In the eyes of God each human being is a free person, whether girl, boy, woman or man, and is destined to exist for the good of all in equality and fraternity. Modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labour and prostitution, organ trafficking and any relationship that fails to respect the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and have the same freedom and dignity, is a crime against humanity."

*Joint declaration of religious leaders against modern slavery,
2 December 2014*



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