

NEW ZEALAND RELIGIOUS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In December 2011, a group of Religious met in Auckland following an NGO forum held in Wellington on the theme, *Pacific Trafficking in Persons*. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the possible formation of a group to address human trafficking and associated human rights abuses in New Zealand. Present at both the forum and subsequent Auckland meeting were representatives from ACRATH (Noelene Simmons SM and Margaret Ng RSJ). In February 2012, twelve Religious representing eight Congregations joined together in Auckland to discern how best to address human trafficking issues in New Zealand. With the support and encouragement of ACRATH and CLCANZ, New Zealand Religious Against Trafficking of Humans (NZRATH) came into being. Congregations represented include: Marist Sisters; Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart; Dominican Sisters; Religious Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary; Sisters of Mercy; Sisters of the Good Shepherd; and Franciscan Friars/Bros. At 31 January 2013 individual members number 17.

As a result of the NGO forum held in Wellington (Dec. 2011), a network of organisations addressing human trafficking / human rights issues was initiated, NZNAPT = NZ Network Against Person Trafficking. It was spearheaded by The Salvation Army, ECPAT Child Alert and HAGAR. The network now covers a large number of NGOs.

Throughout the past year NZRATH has informed itself via the media, Government and NGO press releases and/or publications concerning human trafficking/abuses. We have:

- Joined NZNAPT as a founding member organisation.
- Invited the Assistant Director of Mission from Baradene College of the Sacred Heart to hear of the College's initiative in developing a cross-curricular programme focused on human trafficking / human rights abuses associated with child labour. This centred on the Chocolate and Clothing/Textile industries. The College would be happy to share its resources.
- Made representation to the Auckland Council concerning the application to grant a licence to build and operate a 15 storey adult entertainment centre, incorporating a brothel, in the heart of the city. Specific attention was drawn to the possibility of human trafficking for prostitution. Unfortunately, the licence has been granted.

- Followed the passage of legislation concerning:
 - the rights of migrant workers in the horticulture/viticulture industries;
 - the slave-like conditions in which migrants find themselves when working for extend family members' businesses (restaurants, liquor stores, beauty industry);
 - the use of slave labour on foreign charter fishing vessels in New Zealand waters;
- Contacted various Government and NGO organisations taking measures against sexual exploitation and labour trafficking offences.
- Wrote to the NZ Police and Dept. of Internal Affairs thanking and encouraging them for their work regarding child pornography, especially through tracking technology.
- Supported the Auckland Rape Crisis Centre in its efforts to retain Government funding for a 24 hour Phone line – the outcome was successful!
- Distributed 'Fair Trade Fortnight' resources to members for personal, community and parish use during May.

In addition to regular group meetings, NZRATH hosted a public meeting at which University of Auckland researchers investigating human rights abuses (and possible trafficking) of crew on Foreign Charter Fishing Vessels made an excellent presentation. The meeting was extensively reported in the Catholic media.

Alan Bell, NZ Director of ECPAT Child Alert (child exploitation and child prostitution) gave an excellent presentation at a group meeting. He was most encouraging of our efforts.

ACRATH invited us to send two representatives to their annual conference this month. We are grateful to ACRATH for the invitation and for funding both the travel and the participation of our two representatives.

While NZRATH has yet to finalise its major focus of action, there is significant room within the Catholic and wider community for group members' wide-ranging educational skills to be used in addressing human trafficking and associated human rights abuses.