



Unshackling Supply Chains: The Archdiocese of Sydney Response to Modern Slavery

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Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge our presence on the traditional homeland of the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi Indigenous People. I also acknowledge that we are in a region where slavery was once practiced freely and enabled by the legal system.

The battle to defeat slavery was fought here by people like the African American woman we only know as "Polly" who successfully sued for her own freedom in 1820, Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin who aided thousands of slaves fleeing northward and Jonathan Jennings, Indiana's first Governor who campaigned for statehood on an anti-slavery agenda against pro-slavery forces.

Abraham Lincoln spent his formative years in Indiana and his encounters with slavery here shaped his future thinking and actions.

There is a history of resistance here as evidenced by the many Hoosiers who participated in the Underground Railroad and fought against the persistence of slavery until it became truly illegal in 1823. It is important to acknowledge this history and the impact that it has had on the lives individuals, families and communities.

Today, almost 200 years later, the continuing existence of slavery in its modern forms is a critical health check on our globalised world. Modern slavery is illegal everywhere yet 40.3 million people are trapped in factories, fields, fisheries, mines, on construction sites, on ships, in private homes and in many other industries.

Modern slavery comes in many forms and includes forced labour, child labour and human trafficking. Some people are born into slavery due to crippling debts they have inherited from their families whilst millions of women and girls are subjected to forced marriage or sexually exploited. Some people are forced into criminal activity while others are trafficked for the purpose of organ removal.

The most extreme examples of ownership are a throwback to slavery of the past where people are literally auctioned off to the highest bidder as they were in Libya in 2017 or even sold on the internet. It seems that there is an ever-growing list of ways and means to abuse the vulnerabilities of people.

Human trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices involve the exploitation of people using violence, threats, false promises, manipulation, abuse of power and other forms of coercion for the profit or gain of someone else. Put simply, it is about taking someone's freedom.

Whilst some of the world's slaves are physically held captive, many of the world's slaves are kept in a prison without walls. All of them are producing and providing goods and services for those who wield power and control, or to satisfy the constant supply and demand culture driving our global economy.

The truth is, slavery touches the lives of most of us in this room every day through the supply chains of the goods and services we purchase. Do you own a phone or a computer? Clothing? Shoes? Do you drink coffee or tea? Do you wear jewellery or makeup? Do you buy seafood, pet food, meat, fruit, and vegetables or eat fast food?

You and I cannot deny that we benefit from the exploitation of other human beings largely because they are invisible to us.

Leaders at the highest levels of government, the corporate sector, civil society and the media all know that supply chains in our global economy are tainted with modern slavery and that our purchases are financing criminals. But change is coming.

A movement to end modern slavery is building and each and every one of us here has an opportunity and moral duty to be part of it. This has particular and urgent context for those of us who are Catholic and, indeed, for all Catholic institutions to take steps to bring freedom to those enslaved.

The election of Pope Francis to the Chair of St Peter in March 2013 has proved to be momentous for the anti-slavery movement in the contemporary world. From Rome during the past six years the Church and the world have heard a constant flow of statements and exhortations by the Holy Father in respect of the eradication of modern slavery and human trafficking.

Pope Francis is perhaps the greatest anti-slavery advocate in our world today. He has declared human trafficking to be "an open wound on ... contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ" and "a crime against humanity." He has pledged with other global religious leaders to collectively work to bring each faith community together to rid the world of this affront to human dignity and defilement of human freedom.

The Holy Father was more than an inspiration in the adoption of Goal 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals which seeks to,

"take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers [by 2030], and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms."

Pope Francis is firm and consistent in his belief that we will be victorious over modern slavery and human trafficking. He exhorts the contemporary world and the contemporary Church to provide the collective will and organization to defeat modern slavery in all its manifestations in this generation. Without a doubt, this is one of the most inspiring visions of freedom in our world.

What have we in Australia done in response to the Pope's vision? Our challenge in the Archdiocese of Sydney has been to take meaningful and measureable actions to eradicate modern slavery and inspire the rest of Catholic Australia to follow suit.

In March 2017, the Archbishop of Sydney, Most Rev Anthony Fisher OP publicly committed the Archdiocese of Sydney to a program directed towards the eradication of modern slavery in the supply chains and life of the Archdiocese. In his statement to a New South Wales State Parliamentary Committee, Archbishop Fisher demonstrated he well understood that the Holy Father wanted action.

In proposing action in his own Archdiocese, Archbishop Fisher stated,

“it is not enough for groups such as churches to lecture or exhort the rest of the community in such matters [as modern slavery and human trafficking]. We must demonstrate our own willingness to act where we can. The Vatican has already committed itself to slavery-proofing all its procurement practices and supply lines.

It is no small task to ensure everything we use has been obtained ethically, that everything we obtain has itself been produced and supplied ethically and sustainably, and that those upon whom we rely or with whom we are affiliated are like-minded. It is no small task but we must try. As Pope Francis has pointed out, buying goods is not just a commercial matter; it has moral dimensions.”

The Archdiocese of Sydney and its Archbishop have signalled that Pope Francis has been heard loud and clear by offering a framework for a comprehensive anti-slavery strategy. The Sydney framework encompasses:

- an anti-slavery supply chain strategy
- an ethical purchasing program
- anti-slavery education and external engagement
- anti-slavery welfare services, and
- an ethical investment policy

This far-reaching framework, which is now being implemented, seeks to bring about change in the areas where the Church has the most capacity to influence change; in our supply chains.

As Pope Francis has declared that businesses *“must also be vigilant that forms of subjugation or human trafficking do not find their way into the distribution chain. Together with the social responsibility of businesses, there is also the social responsibility of consumers.”* The vigilance and social responsibility of business and consumers described by Pope Francis applies, in all respects, to Catholic dioceses and Catholic institutions.

Archbishop Fisher's anti-slavery project was also significant as much was happening in Australia's anti-slavery sector to enact state and federal legislation focused on slavery in supply chains and modelled on the UK Modern Slavery Act. The Archdiocese of Sydney was able to participate in advocacy for this legislation and bring its influence to bear on both Australian and New South Wales legislatures.

Both of these acts provide, with notable differences in scope and penalties, public reporting requirements in respect of business activities and supply chains of various Australian public sector agencies, corporate entities and civil society organisations. Although, we believe the New South Wales state legislation is the stronger of the two, it is the Australian legislation that applies to our various Catholic entities.

In a nutshell, the Australian legislation will:

- Apply to at least 3,000 entities, including foreign entities and public sector agencies. There is threshold of \$A100 million annual turnover.
- Require reporting in the form of a Modern Slavery Statement in respect of all modern slavery practices criminalised under Australian law.
- Require reports to be published on a government-run, public central repository to ensure all Modern Slavery Statements are easily accessible.
- Require reporting entities to provide information about: their structure, operations and supply chains; potential modern slavery risks; actions taken to assess and address these risks; and how they assess the effectiveness of their actions.

As I make this address to you we are still awaiting official guidanceⁱⁱ for reporting entities through a dedicated Business Engagement Unit in the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. And whilst we were disappointed that the new Australian legislation does not include any penalties similar to the state legislation there will be opportunities to advocate for amendments via a review in three years.

Whilst we in the Archdiocese of Sydney had a strong prior mandate from Archbishop Fisher, it is worth commemorating that all of Australia's major supply chains are now subject to anti-slavery requirements. Preparing modern slavery statements is now a statutory duty for senior managers across corporate Australia and that the commencement of reporting is only months away.

Catholic aid and development agencies are engaged in alleviating poverty which is the main contributor to making people vulnerable to modern slavery. Catholic community services provide enormous support to survivors by addressing their welfare needs and we must continue to advocate for redress and compensation.

It is important to note Archbishop Fisher believes it is critical to attack slavery through supply chains and that this is the focal point of our endeavors. The time is now that we must leverage our commercial, investment and business resources towards preventing these crimes by ridding our supply chains of slavery.

When we appreciate that 80% of trade flows through global supply chains and consider the sheer extent of the supply chains of Catholic institutions (such as schools, hospitals and universities) we can see that our possible exposure to modern slavery is enormous. So, too, is our capacity to effect change. We cannot say that it is too hard, too complex or too costly for us.

Although, Australia's 25 million people make it a small country in comparison to the United States, the procurement of goods and services by the Catholic Church in Australia is probably the largest outside of the public sector. By way of example, 1 in 5 Australian children are educated in Catholic schools and 1 in 10 hospital patients and aged care residents receive care in Catholic health facilities.

Schools, hospitals, aged care, universities, investment and insurance funds are just some of the Catholic institutions that touch the lives of millions of Australians regardless of faith. In addition, there are 1349 parishes and 5.1 million people who identify as Catholic across the nation. They can be called to act against modern slavery in their homes, workplaces and communities. Indeed, the major exposure to modern slavery by the Church in Australia relates to our procurement decisions – to the buying of goods and services and to investment decisions. This includes not only Church institutions which have a procurement function but parishes, religious communities, families and individuals who also make daily purchasing decisions, as well as the investment decisions of Catholic agencies and development funds.

Whilst the Archdiocese of Sydney is one of 33 Catholic Dioceses in Australia, we seek to act as pathfinders and bring others along with us. Take a moment to consider the breadth and depth of such a project by the Catholic Church in Australia and its wide-scale reach through its purchasing power.

Our anti-slavery supply chain strategy is multifaceted and is set out in the January 2018 Taskforce Reportⁱⁱⁱ to Archbishop Fisher. It involves the implementation of an effective anti-slavery supply chain strategy for Catholic institutions with procurement functions. Our strategy uses the so-called Australian Model of supply chain regulation which is an international best practice model incorporating human rights due diligence throughout supply chains.

This Model is based on the premise that in order to combat modern slavery and other forms of exploitation, it is imperative to know the locations and conditions of work for all who labour throughout the supply chain at both national and global levels.

Transparency is achieved by harnessing contractual arrangements, which already regulate global supply chains. Both national and global supply chains are comprised of a successive chain of contractual arrangements for the production of goods or the provision of services.

Businesses at the top of supply chains already use contracts to leverage their relative power to effect outcomes throughout the chain with regards to quality, cost and safety. This same mechanism may be harnessed to combat modern slavery and slavery-like practices.

The Australian Model builds into contracting arrangements human rights due diligence provisions for the protection of all workers throughout the supply chain. These provisions are binding on all suppliers throughout the chain.

Moreover, a major strength of the Model is the implementation of a robust system of compliance due diligence. The Model differs from and is superior to other models of supply chain regulation which rely primarily on Codes of Conduct, supplier self-report and auditing.

The Taskforce has also developed an ethical purchasing guide for use by priests and parishes, communities, families and individuals. This resource, known as Shop For Good is being used to educate the faithful about the link between what they buy and modern slavery, and so equip them to make ethical purchasing decisions.

On behalf of the Archdiocese of Sydney we are actively engaged in advocating for effective anti-slavery supply chain strategies in the public and private sectors. We are working to ensure that legislation, regulations and public procurement policy requires human rights due diligence throughout supply chains.

Our proposal for the global Church is based on the sure fact that Catholic institutions and communities the world over interface with modern slavery each and every day through their supply chains. We therefore propose that Catholic organisations with procurement functions (such as Catholic educational facilities and health systems) adopt effective anti-slavery supply chain strategies which implement human rights due diligence throughout all tiers of their supply chains.

We also propose that priests, parishes and the wider Catholic community, including Catholic commercial entities, are equipped and empowered about how they can contribute to ending modern slavery through ethical purchasing and ethical investment decisions. And we propose that, in its engagement with governments, the Church worldwide adopt a policy position that actively supports anti-slavery supply chain legislation and ethical public procurement.

While all of us in the Antislavery movement recognise and acclaim the leading and direction setting role of Pope Francis in worldwide Catholic anti-slavery action, we must carry his vision into our present world and generation. We must also acknowledge with gratitude the difficult but vital work being carried out by Catholic groups, particularly Religious sisters and other anti-slavery organizations to support and protect victims and to expand justice and freedom in our world.

Like Pope Francis, we truly believe that it is possible to eradicate modern slavery in this generation. Like Pope Francis, we also believe that the Church throughout the world must demonstrate the will and the determination to effect liberating change in the lives of the many millions enslaved for the goods and services our world consumes. We can hope and plan that soon there is convened, in Rome, an international conference on Catholic supply chains which would educate and empower the global Church to carry out this work.

So, we challenge the Church worldwide to embrace an effective anti-slavery supply chain strategy at institutional, diocesan and national levels and to engage with the Archdiocese of Sydney about how to implement such strategies. For Church leaders everywhere, Archbishop Fisher sets a new standard for strategy and effective action.

We believe that the Church throughout the world must demonstrate the will and determination to combat what Pope Francis describes as a crime against humanity. We hope our efforts in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney will help to empower and educate the global church towards effective action everywhere.

Going forward the famous words of William Wilberforce take on new relevance for Catholic leadership throughout the world “You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know.”

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ⁱⁱ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs draft reporting guidance released for consultation on 1st April 2019 <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/how-to-engage-us-subsite/files/draft-modern-slavery-act-reporting-entity-guidance.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.sydneycatholic.org/casys/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Anti-Slavery-Taskforce-Recommendations.pdf>