

Report from the ACRATH visit to Canberra – 15 – 19th September 2008.

After much planning and preparation 11 members of the ACRATH group were present in Canberra for part or all of the week. We met with some 61 Members (representing all the parties), advisors or other groups during the time in Canberra. From Monday to Thursday we spent each day in the House, learning our way around again and discovering that the distance from one end of the House of Reps to the other end of the Senate area was quite challenging. It required careful planning so that the distances could be negotiated and one member of our group lamented that she had not brought her pedometer! Throughout the House we were greeted with warmth and courtesy.....when we arrived on the Monday morning and entered through the House of Representatives' door we were greeted with a "Good morning Sisters" from the security guard on the desk. This certainly set the tone for all our encounters while wandering the corridors of power and later we heard that it was known throughout the House that the "nuns" were visiting. During our visit we experienced an emergency evacuation exercise, a Leadership spill and the launch of the Costello memoirs!

When we met with either individuals or groups we gave them a page on which were listed our key lobbying points. These covered Visas, Services for people who have been trafficked into Australia, Community Education, International Co-operation, Repatriation and The Courts. As well we congratulated the Government on its whole of Government approach to address human trafficking and its commitment to ensure Government and Civil society work together. We also had prepared a media release and although there were some competing events we were able to attract some media attention. The ABC International (Asia/Pacific) TV completed a piece on us on our last afternoon in the House and it was broadcast the next day. We have received reports from connections in Vietnam and Kiribati that it was screened in those countries.....no doubt in many more. We were also included in Cath News on Wednesday 17th September.

Individual Members showed great interest and promised to support the cause in whatever way they can. Our meetings with Ministers and/or their advisors were particularly profitable. The collaboration and support from these were echoed in the meeting we had on Friday with representatives from many Government Departments. Represented at this meeting were women from ACRATH, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Office for Women, Australian Federal Police, AUSAID, the Attorney General's Department and the Department for Home Affairs. We also met with representatives from the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Of particular note was the meeting we had with Minister Tanya Plibersek, OFW, whose office has the oversight of the support program for victims of trafficking. We were delighted that Ms Kerry Rea, member for Bonner put up a motion in the House of Representatives on Friday evening. The motion, around TIP issues, was debated in the House and received support from both sides of politics. I have attached a copy of the Hansard Report as ACRATH receives honourable mention (2). We are also aware that as a

result of our meeting with Senator Barnaby Joyce the issue will be raised in the Senate as well. These are excellent outcomes.

If you would like any more details of our visit please don't hesitate to contact:
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Co-ordinator

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Stop Slavery of Women and Children!

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