



## **Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans**

**Submission to the Human Rights Sub-committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for the Inquiry into certain aspects of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2019-20 - child and forced marriage. Specifically matters relating to Australia's efforts to advocate for the worldwide elimination of child and forced marriage.**

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## **Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans**

Hon Kevin Andrews MP  
Chair of the Human Rights Sub-Committee  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Department of the Senate  
Canberra ACT 2600

1 June 2021

Dear Mr Andrews

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) welcomes the opportunity to provide its submission to the Human Rights Sub-Committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, on matters relating to Australia's efforts to advocate for the worldwide elimination of child and forced marriage.

Our submission provides four recommendations to support practical, realistic, and achievable measures to address the vulnerabilities of forced marriage victims - survivors in Australia, our region and globally. It is our hope the Australian Government will include forced and child marriage as part of Australia's aid program placed equally alongside gender equality and women's empowerment.

While we acknowledge the huge task of eliminating forced marriage globally, we are confident that it can be eliminated when government and civil society collaborate, using their respective strengths and working across national and international borders.

ACRATH would be pleased to appear virtually at the Sub-committee's public hearing on 18 June 2021 and we look forward to receiving additional information for our attendance.

We would be pleased to provide further information on request.

Yours sincerely

Christine Carolan  
CEO  
ACRATH

Louise Cleary  
President  
ACRATH

## **Who is ACRATH?**

ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans) is an Australian registered charity with a network that spans across Australia in cities, regional centres, and remote Australia. The network extends overseas including to countries in Asia, the Pacific and Timor Leste, where ACRATH members have worked for many decades and have a deep understanding of local communities and culture.

ACRATH's purpose is to eliminate human trafficking and the harm it causes, in Australia, the Asia Pacific region and globally. We do this in collaboration with non-government organisations. Forced marriage is a key focus of our work. The purpose of ACRATH's forced marriage work is to prevent forced marriages here in Australia and in countries linked to Australians vulnerable to a forced marriage. We support the work of many faiths that advocate on behalf of vulnerable people, in partnership with faith communities and with local communities.

Key components of ACRATH's forced marriage program are:

- Delivering training modules to front line workers in health and education across Australia and the Asia Pacific region including;
  - sharing the data indicating vulnerabilities to forced marriage
  - highlighting the indicative signs of forced marriage and key actions to take to support someone who may be facing a forced marriage and
  - training staff to take appropriate steps to lead a victim safely out of a potentially illegal and harmful situation.
- Raising awareness of forced marriage as a form of human trafficking in Australia by;
  - working collaboratively with agencies and faith communities to develop community strengthening strategies to tackle the causes of forced marriage
  - advocating to Federal and State Governments for support services for victims-survivors of forced marriage and
  - providing companionship for survivors of forced marriage by offering a compassionate person to walk alongside a survivor and build a trusting relationship.

## **How does ACRATH currently engage internationally to promote the elimination of child and forced marriage?**

ACRATH has been working on the issue of forced marriage since 2008. At that time we raised the issue of forced marriage with the Federal Government Office for Women. We highlighted concerns brought to us by experienced workers in Catholic refuges who were witnessing the plight of women who had been brought to Australia to marry someone and who then found themselves in need of refuge from their new 'husband'. ACRATH identified the following issues:

1. Young women are brought to Australia to marry and discover on arrival in Australia that the marriage they are entering into is not what they had agreed to.
2. Young women who are taken to their parents' country of origin to marry against their will.
3. Young women, often citizens or with Australian permanent residency, who are forced to marry in Australia.

## Key Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

**It is recommended that the Government, through DFAT, strengthens its work with the NGOs that work on forced and child marriage issues, both in Australia and globally.** Ideally this work could include resourcing a three-to-five-year project that would support NGOs that have technical expertise and networks, to work with community-based organisations in Australia and overseas. That work would include advocating for the end of forced marriage, supporting victims of forced marriage, and working with governments and communities to design interventions that will end forced marriage.

NGOs such as ACRATH have considerable experience working globally to address forced marriage. Since 2008 ACRATH has undertaken the following activities that have included collaborating with government agencies and non-government organisations:

- Funded the airfares of about ten young Australians needing to return home quickly from their parents' country of origin in order to avoid a forced marriage.
- Supported young women who have fled a forced marriage in Australia after travelling from their country of birth and believing they were coming to Australia for a real marriage. These young women who fled the forced marriage have been taken in by a family violence refuge; a number of these refuges did not know about forced marriage, and some were not funded to support a woman who had been less than two years in Australia.
- Collaborated with NGO's and education institutions to deliver high quality and effective training in the prevention of forced marriage.
- In 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, ACRATH worked with Flinders University (SA) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to host a well-attended webinar on forced marriage for front line workers, academics, and people from partner NGO's; the webinar was recorded and has been further used for training purposes.

### Recommendation 2

**It is recommended that the Government provide awareness raising programs and training on forced and child marriage for Australian officials including DFAT and Home Affairs.** This is especially appropriate for officials based in, or accredited to, countries where data shows that forced and child marriage is prevalent. ACRATH has assisted the AFP with their training programs to officers in human trafficking and forced marriage. ACRATH has participated in awareness raising programs with government officials from the Pacific Island nations and from South East Asia.

- ACRATH believes that there are clear indications of need to the raise awareness level of in-country diplomatic staff, to ensure that they are well informed about the Australia Law on forced marriage. Accurate and up-to-date information about how to advise and refer victims to suitable assistance pathways on their return to Australia is also a necessity.
- Training programs would support officials in learning to identify the signs for potential cases and how to take effective action. It would also help officials understand the socio-cultural and structural factors that underpin these practices.
- ACRATH is experienced in working with diplomatic missions, foreign governments, and civil society. ACRATH has delivered presentations to diplomatic missions on human trafficking in

Indonesia and Thailand. These opportunities are invaluable to overseas missions as they provide detailed information and personal stories from survivors.

- ACRATH has worked with a partner NGO in the Philippines to set up an exhibition of victim/survivor stories and paintings for the Australian Embassy in Manila.

### **Recommendation 3**

**It is recommended that the Government supports efforts to raise awareness of forced marriage, in Australia and globally, by working with media and interfaith communities.**

Knowledge about Australian and International law forced marriage indicative behaviours, victim-survivor impacts, and supportive referral pathways is not always well known or understood across Australia's multicultural communities. By working together, government, faith communities, and the media can educate and support real action in communities where forced marriage occurs and child brides are at risk.

- ACRATH has been involved in advocacy against forced marriage since 2008. We engage with national and regional media to spread the message that forced marriage still occurs within and beyond our borders. For example, in 2020, ACRATH briefed television journalists and an Australian Women's magazine for backgrounding for their media pieces on forced marriage.
- Engagement with interfaith communities, both in Australia and overseas, is a crucial and highly sensitive component of ACRATH's work. In this we have engaged with various multicultural youth organisations and with interfaith leaders. Raising awareness with target audiences, offering accurate and detailed information about how to intervene to prevent a forced marriage remains an essential platform for our collaborative work.

### **Recommendation 4**

**It is recommended that the Australian Government steps up its efforts in bilateral dialogues, multilateral engagements and forums, including human rights forums, to raise the issue of forced and child marriage especially with countries where it is practised.**

The government should take every available opportunity to highlight the issue of forced and child marriage whenever it meets with foreign governments and key interlocutors. Australia's commitment to ending slavery should include serious efforts to end the practice of forced and child marriages.

### **Recommendation 5**

**It is recommended that the Australian Government includes forced and child marriage as part of Australia's aid program engagement including the funding in the aid program alongside the keystone gender equality and women's empowerment program.**

To demonstrate its strong commitment to ending forced and child marriage the Government should integrate policies that address forced and child marriage within DFAT's gender equality and women's empowerment program. Such a strategy would enable appropriate expertise and funding to be allocated to programs aimed at ending forced and child marriage.