

Friday 29 July 2016

Federal Government must act to end the scourge of trafficking and slavery

Modern slavery is growing in Australia and going undetected and unpunished, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) warns ahead of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons tomorrow, Saturday 30 July.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that there are 21 million people worldwide who are victims of trafficking and forced labour, with the Asia Pacific region accounting for 56% of the figure. An equal number are trafficked for the purposes of sexual and labour servitude.

The recent scandals in Australia exposing exploitation on a massive scale in agricultural supply chains and the retail industry clearly demonstrate that these are not just random occurrences.

The 2016 Global Slavery Index estimates there are some 4,300 number of people living in slavery in Australia.

In 2013 the Australian Parliament passed legislation to expand the legal definition of servitude to include labour, but so far no convictions against any employer have been recorded.

The ACTU would like to see the Turnbull Government ratify the 2014 ILO Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, giving us further ammunition in the fight against what has become a global scourge.

Given that we have just seen the first case of exploitation of workers brought in under the China Free Trade Agreement, with sadly probably many more to come, our government needs to also immediately stop the inclusion of labour clauses in upcoming trade agreements.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver:

“The Federal Government must do more to end trafficking and slavery in Australia. Better regulation, more transparency and greater resources should be used to prosecute those responsible, regardless of where they sit in the supply chain.

“The Australian Federal Police officers need to be properly trained to be able to spot victims of trafficking and modern slavery and not simply brush them off being part of industrial issues.

“Victims should also not be deported but instead issued visas which would encourage more people to come forward.

“We must also look to regulate labour hire companies and the migration agents who are currently the biggest abusers of our temporary working visa system.

“No human being should be subjected to working against their will or threatened with deportation for seeking to escape their oppressive working conditions.

“It’s hard reconcile the reality of slavery existing in modern Australia, and unions will keep fighting to protect the rights and dignity of all those who have been subjected to these abuses.”

ENDS

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