

MEDIA RELEASE

Salvos & Walk Free Demand Dignity for Domestic Workers

Sydney -- Today, The Salvation Army's [Freedom Partnership](#) and [Walk Free](#) are launching a national campaign asking the Australian Government to sign [International Labour Organisation Convention 189](#) (ILO C189) to enhance domestic workers rights and protections. An estimated 54,000 domestic workers are in Australia, many of whom have travelled here to take up their job [1]. 90% of these workers are women. [2] Eric Abetz, Minister for Employment, has declined action to ratify the Convention citing that Australia already complies. In practice, barriers still remain for domestic workers to access their rights.

Domestic workers in Australia have compared their lives to being "in jail, like a prisoner, like a slave, like a servant." One woman working in a private home was told "you must iron my clothes and make my food whenever I like and what I like...you must care for me...you are here to do the housework...otherwise it's no use keeping you here." [3]

Jenny Stanger, National Manager of The Salvation Army's Freedom Partnership says, "There's a name for this sort of treatment: modern slavery. We view ratification of ILO C189 as a necessary tool Australia can use to combat modern slavery. The UN Special Rapporteur and others have called for ratification in the past. It's time for Australia to be a leader on this issue in our region."

[Luke Geary](#), Managing Partner at law firm [Salvos Legal Humanitarian](#) has represented several domestic workers trafficked to Australia into private homes and even in diplomatic households. Luke's involvement in those cases extended to assisting with the following migration process, supporting potential criminal prosecutions and also civil actions against the traffickers. "There are immense challenges for victims in achieving successful legal outcomes, especially in recovering wages they never received. Article 16 & 17 of the Convention are important in that they obligate the government to ensure access to effective complaint mechanisms. This is difficult if victims are being threatened with deportation."

Katharine Bryant, Research Manager at Walk Free and lead author of the [Global Slavery Index](#) says, "The 2013 Global Slavery Index estimates that over 3,000 people are living in modern slavery in Australia. There have been abhorrent situations where domestic workers have been forced to work long days, abused verbally and physically by their employers, denied freedom and the wages they were promised. This includes cases of domestics working in diplomatic households, a well-documented global problem that also occurs here."

The campaign is being launched with international human rights activist, [Cecilia Flores-Oebanda](#), Executive Director of [Visayan Forum](#) who successfully lobbied for the passage of ILO Convention 189 by the Philippines Government in 2013.

Additional campaign asks are that domestic workers are:

- Granted bridging visas to enable them to remain in Australia temporarily to pursue civil cases against their employer if other visa options are not available;
- Provided culturally appropriate rights information prior to their departure to Australia and follow-up safety and welfare checks after arrival

Join the Campaign at: <http://campaigns.walkfree.org/p/domesticworkerdignity>

For enquiries please contact Salvos Media on 02 9266 9820

References:

- [1] <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/EmploymentProjections>
- [2] 2010 Productivity Commission
- [3] http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/publications/rpp/124/rpp124.pdf

Media on domestic workers and modern slavery:

Australia

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-27/woman-treated-like-a-slave-by-canberra-family/4847176>

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/sacked-maid-takes-on-peru-embassy-in-australia-20131214-2zeb1.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fx99hzKj4iE>

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/four-filipino-boxers-used-as-houseboys-20101019-16slk.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfSJLB8dLjk>

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/diplomat-servants-unpaid-slavery/2007/03/10/1173478729100.html>

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/nanny-slave-cases-highlight-gap-in-policy-20131214-2zdvr.html>

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/05/07/1083911408199.html>

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/National/Maid-owed-43000-by-consul-to-be-deported/2005/03/08/1110160827556.html>

Research papers:

http://sydney.edu.au/law/slr/slr_32/slr32_4/Schloenhardt_and_Jolly.pdf

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/461-480/tandi468.html>