

**REPORT TO THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS
INSTITUTIONS 8TH ANNUAL MEETING**

**THE WORK OF THE AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL
OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION TO ADDRESS TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN**

KATHMANDU, NEPAL, FEBRUARY 2004

Since the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) in September 2002 in Delhi, Australia has seen the issue of trafficking in women highlighted. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has been involved in the development of these issues as a key player.

In December 2002, the Australian Government signed the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children*.

In March 2003, the NSW Coroner reported on the inquest into the death in Villawood Immigration Detention Centre of a young woman thought to be from Thailand who had been detained following a raid on the Sydney brothel in which she had been working as a sex worker. Despite her assertions to Immigration officials that she had been trafficked into Australia, she was held in immigration detention pending her deportation. There was no investigation of her allegations. Within 70 hours of her detention, she was dead.

The Coroner's report stimulated significant and sustained media interest. The Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Pru Goward, made public and media comments about the shortcomings of the Government's approach to trafficking issues.

As a result of this media attention, the Minister for Justice, Senator Chris Ellison, announced the establishment of an Inter-departmental Committee to consider and report on the federal Government's handling of trafficking issues.

Commissioner Goward and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's trafficking focal point have attended several meetings with the Minister for Justice and the Inter-departmental Committee to discuss the work and the Commission's preferred approach. In addition, the Commission made a written submission to this work. Amongst other things, that submission canvassed the possibility of using the APF trafficking focal point network as a support framework for victims of trafficking on their repatriation.

Commissioner Goward and the trafficking focal point emphasised the importance of supporting women who may have been trafficked into Australia and ensuring a human rights approach is central to all dealings with trafficked women.

This attention to the issue of trafficking in women culminated in the Federal Government announcing, on 13 October 2003, an AUD 20 million package over four years to address trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. The announcement of the package was signed by the Minister for Justice and Customs, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, the Attorney General and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

This announcement came 10 days ahead of the Commission's conference entitled *Stop the Traffic II* on 23 and 24 October 2003 in Melbourne, Australia.

The Commission organised and funded that conference along with Project Respect, the major non-government organisation working on trafficking issues, and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

The Conference received significant media attention and was considered by participants to be very successful.

The Minister for Justice addressed a cocktail party during the conference to discuss the Government's package of responses.

The President of the Commission, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner and the Commission's trafficking focal point on trafficking each addressed that conference. Staff of the Commission, including the Executive Director, also attended the conference.

The Commission funded travel, conference fees and expenses for two officers of APF members – the Indian Commission and the Malaysian Commission – to attend the conference. Dr Savita Bhakry of the Indian Commission and PM Nair, who is undertaking work on behalf of the Indian Commission on trafficking issues, addressed the conference.

Keynote speaker at the Conference was Paul Holmes, an international expert in counter trafficking, child prostitution, paedophilia and the commercial exploitation of human beings, and author of the Interpol best practice manual '*Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation*'. He has extensive British policing experience.

The Commission is now working with Project Respect on developing a joint training package for State and federal government agencies dealing with trafficking, including police and immigration officers. That project included a train-the-trainer component. The training was delivered by Paul Holmes, the Conference keynote speaker, on 20 and 21 October 2003 and was attended by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commission staff, officers of Project Respect and representatives of members and the secretariat of the APF. Paul Holmes also addressed members of the Australian Federal Police and State police services at the Australian Federal Police College. The Commission's trafficking focal point and officers of Project Respect observed that training as part of the train-the-trainer program.

The trafficking focal point continues to monitor trafficking issues on the ground and is in contact with community workers who work with trafficked women. The trafficking focal point acts as a conduit for information between different groups and individuals working on the issue.

The Commission will continue to liaise with other APF members on the issue of trafficking wherever possible and relevant. For example, the Commission's trafficking focal point will be leading a study tour to Thailand and Vietnam in April 2004 as part of the China Australia Human Rights Technical Co-operation Program. Contact has been made with the Thai Commission and it is hoped a meeting between the Thai Commission and the study tour delegation will be arranged.

A package containing fact sheets and other information about the Commission's work on trafficking in women is available on the Commission website.

12 February 2004