

26 May 2015, Sydney - Today, people who have experienced slavery in Australia welcome an announcement of changes to the visa framework they have advocated for since 2011. The Freedom Advocates are people who have been trafficked or enslaved in Australia and who are using their experience to inform the government and community's response. The Australian Government has announced the following:

1. Renaming the permanent Witness Protection Trafficking Visa (WPTV) which previously stigmatised cooperating witnesses
2. Removing the Criminal Justice Stay Visa (CJSV) from the framework, replaced with a bridging visa for cooperating victims
3. Adding eligibility for the Adult Migrant English Program for bridging visa holders
4. Removing the two-year waiting period for an alternate support payment to Special Benefit after grant of the WPTV

"The changes we have asked for are based on our experiences of slavery here in Australia," says Freedom Advocate, Sandra, who was enslaved as a domestic worker for 3 years without pay in a private Sydney home before she was liberated by the Department of Immigration. "It was very hard for me to explain in job interviews that I was a victim not a criminal when I had to tell an employer what visa I had. It took me years to find work. I was granted all of the visas and know first-hand these changes will help those that come after me. It's better to have just two visas in the framework – a temporary and permanent. The experience of trafficking is very traumatic but so is life afterwards if you can't get the support you need. I am encouraged by the announcement."

Freedom Advocate Eduardo left slavery with the help of the Australian Federal Police after his Australian co-workers alerted them to his plight working in a restaurant. "I experienced a lot of depression and suicidal thoughts for a long time. If I had been able to study English straight away, I would have improved my language skills and independence. I would have had a daily routine, a way to make new friends and just feel a bit normal. It would have helped me to understand the legal process and be a better witness. Trying to find work with the word 'criminal' in the name of my visa was so impossible and then having the other visa with the word 'trafficking' also made people ask a lot of personal questions I didn't want to answer. After I was granted the WPTV, I was trapped on Special Benefit for an additional 2 years when NewStart would have better supported my needs. I am very very glad to see these changes."

Since 2011, the Freedom Advocates have engaged with policy makers by contributing to submissions, sharing their experiences with researchers and the United Nations *Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons*, public speaking, directly visiting politicians, and participating in media. They have even attended private dinners with former and current Prime Ministers Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott. In December 2014, the first survivor of slavery attended the Government's *National Roundtable on People Trafficking and Slavery* which has been convened since 2008. "The announcement signals to us that Government recognises how vital it is for victims to get the right supports at the right time," says Jenny Stanger, National Manager of the Salvos [Freedom Partnership to End Modern Slavery](#) which trains and supports the Freedom Advocates in collaboration with and funded by [Project Futures](#).

Human trafficking is the physical movement of people across or within borders through coercion, threat or deception for the purpose of exploiting them when they reach their destination.

Slavery occurs when a person exercises the rights of ownership over another person.

Practices involving exploitation so serious that they are considered similar to slavery are known as slavery-like practices.

Slavery-like practices include:

◇ servitude ◇ forced labour ◇ deceptive recruiting ◇ debt bondage ◇ forced marriage

These crimes all have different elements – they may involve exploitation in the public or the private sphere; they may occur in any industry, including the sex, agriculture, construction, hospitality, or domestic services industries; and they may or may not require the victim to be moved across a border.

What they all have in common, however, is that they involve the manipulation of complex relationships between the offender and the victim, and that they result in the serious undermining of the victim's personal freedom and ability to make choices for themselves. This can be through the use of physical threats or psychological coercion, because they are treated as property, or, in some cases, because they are literally bought or sold.

(Excerpt from Australian Government [National Action Plan to Combat People Trafficking and Slavery 2015 – 2019](#))