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MEDIA RELEASE

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IMPROVED SUPPORT FOR TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

The Australian Government today announced changes to Australia's anti-people trafficking strategy to provide improved support for victims.

The changes, announced at the second meeting of the National Roundtable on People Trafficking in Canberra today, will simplify the framework, enable a wider range of victims to access support and improve services to victims and their families.

The changes to the Government's *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* and the *People Trafficking Visa Framework* recognise the particular vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking and provide a more flexible framework to support victims and their families.

The Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said he was pleased to be introducing the changes to the *People Trafficking Visa Framework*, which have been developed following consultations with a range of stakeholders.

"These changes will simplify the framework and, importantly, provide victims and their immediate family members with greater certainty about their immigration status," Senator Evans said.

Minister for the Status of Women, Tanya Plibersek, said the changes would enable a wider range of trafficking victims to access support services.

"The expansion of the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program*, along with the Government's appointment of the Red Cross to case manage the Program, will greatly improve assistance to victims," Ms Plibersek said.

Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O'Connor said the Government was committed to combating all forms of people trafficking, including trafficking for sexual servitude and labour exploitation. Most victims of trafficking identified in Australia have been women working in the sex industry.

"The changes the Government is announcing today will improve the support available for victims and their families, who have often suffered greatly as a result of the crime, and who are critical to bring offenders to justice," Mr O'Connor said.

The *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* has provided assistance to 131 people since its inception in January 2004.

Changes to the anti trafficking strategy will include:

- extending the initial stage of the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* from 30 to 45 days, and making it available to identified victims irrespective of whether they are willing to assist police. This will provide all victims with an opportunity to recover and seek advice about their future options.
- providing up to 90 days assistance for victims who are willing but not able to assist police, due to factors such as trauma. Where the victims do not hold a valid visa they can be granted a second Bridging F visa.
- access to the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program* will be available to identified victims who hold any kind of valid visa so victims do not have to relinquish existing visas in order to receive support.
- providing up to 20 days transitional support so victims assisting law enforcement can consider their future options, seek legal advice, arrange travel and find support networks after involvement in the *Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program*.
- removing the temporary visa stage in the Witness Protection (Trafficking) visa process, and starting the process before the completion of a prosecution. This will reduce the pathway to a permanent visa for eligible victims by at least two years.
- reducing the threshold for a Witness Protection (Trafficking) Certificate from having made a “significant contribution” to making “a contribution”.
- enabling immediate family members who are outside Australia to be included in an application for a Witness Protection (Trafficking) visa.

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