

Media Release – 15 February

Walk Free welcomes clear timeframe for an Australian Modern Slavery Act

Walk Free Foundation Founder, Mr Andrew Forrest AO, today welcomed the Federal Government's progress toward stamping out modern slavery in Australia.

At a seminar in Canberra organised by Walk Free and The Salvation Army, Assistant Minister for Home Affairs Alex Hawke committed to introducing a draft Bill for an Australian Modern Slavery Act to Parliament by June 30, with a view to passing final legislation by the end of year.

This important commitment was commended by Mr Forrest, who said it was a strong signal of positive momentum for change and would be even better if it was completed in time for Australia to set an example in the region at the Bali Process Government and Business Forum in August.

"Australia has the chance to lead by example in the Asia Pacific," Mr Forrest said.

"It is time for an Australian Modern Slavery Act and, with this announcement, the Government has reaffirmed it is ready to take action."

Mr Hawke also said he was considering the potential for the reporting requirements on procurement for businesses to also apply to the Commonwealth Government, something Walk Free Foundation has been calling for.

"I am very keen to make sure that Government has to comply with the requirements that we are going to put on business," Mr Hawke said.

Mr Forrest applauded this progress, the Government's work with Walk Free to develop an Australian 'national estimate' for modern slavery before the end of the year, and its announcement of a new initiative to support victims of forced marriage.

Victims of forced marriage will now be able to access up to 200 days of support through the *Support for Trafficked People Program* without being required to contribute to a criminal investigation or prosecution.

As revealed in last year's Global Estimates of Modern Slavery - produced by Walk Free and the International Labour Organization in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (both U.N. agencies) - a shocking 15.4 million people are living in situations of forced marriage globally.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected and account for 84 percent of victims.

Fiona David, Executive Director of Global Research at the Walk Free Foundation, said the Government initiative is a strong step in the right direction.

"We know from Walk Free Foundation's research that victims of forced marriage may be reluctant to engage with the police," Ms David said.

"They don't want their parents or relatives arrested - they just want the pressure to marry to stop.

"This announcement by the Government today, delinking support services from the need to engage with police, will see more victims of forced marriage get help and lead to real change." ENDS.