

Anti-trafficking coalition welcomes proposed changes to Crimes Act to better protect children, calls for cross-party support

A proposed law change to help protect children from trafficking, and to bring New Zealand's laws on trafficking in line with international standards is being welcomed by the Human Trafficking Research Coalition (HTRC).

Under the current law, trafficking charges can only be brought if there is evidence of coercion or deception. This means that not all forms of child trafficking are criminalised in New Zealand.

The HTRC supports the [Crimes \(Trafficking in Persons\) Amendment Bill](#) which seeks to amend the Crimes Act 1961 so that “coercion and deception” are irrelevant for the purposes of prosecution.

“Every child deserves to live life in safety and dignity; however, the current law does not uphold the best interests of children. The passing of this Bill would mean we have greater powers to prosecute those who prey on innocent children, as well as assist in New Zealand discharging its international and domestic obligations to children,” says Eleanor Parkes, Acting Director of NZ Human Trafficking Research Coalition.

However, the Coalition is calling on the Government [to go further and include additional recommendations put forward by the HTRC](#) to bring New Zealand fully in line with our international obligations.

“We have a responsibility to do everything we can to make sure that children are fully protected from sexual and other forms of exploitation”.

Amendments to the Crimes Act have also been consistently recommended by the US Trafficking in Persons reports and human rights reviews of New Zealand law. Last year, New Zealand was downgraded in its global ranking as the New Zealand Government ‘does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking’.

“There is no time to waste. We know the vast majority of New Zealanders care about the protection of New Zealand children, so we are confident that this bill will have cross-party consensus,” says Parkes.

“The HTRC is calling on politicians to put the needs and interests of New Zealand children first by supporting this Bill so that we can move swiftly to add an additional layer of protection for our precious tamariki”.

Background

The [HTRC is a coalition of organisations](#) that engage in research and advocacy to combat exploitation and human trafficking in Aotearoa.

The coalition [has been advocating](#) for New Zealand's definition of child trafficking to be amended under the Crimes Act 1961. In March 2022 on Child Exploitation Awareness Day, 15 New Zealand NGOs wrote a [letter](#) to the Minister for Children requesting the law change to better protect New Zealand children.

The [US Trafficking in Persons Report](#) and [Commonwealth Protect Report](#) have urged the New Zealand Government to proceed with this amendment.

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