

## **THE TIME MUST BE NOW**

### **An Urgent Message to G20 Leaders and Governments**

### **Action to Eradicate Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Forced Labour in Our Generation**

Modern slavery describes slavery and slavery-like practices including forced labour, child labour and human trafficking. Over 40 million people around the world are trapped in modern slavery; 10 million of them children. More people than at any time in history despite the fact that modern slavery is illegal in almost every country and prohibited by numerous International agreements.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, modern slavery is a critical health check on our globalised world. Never before have so many children, women and men been exploited to provide services to those who wield power and control, or to satisfy the constant supply and demand culture driving our global economy. This economic structure prioritises profit above the dignity of the human being, leaving the most vulnerable exposed to exploitation with women, children and migrants disproportionately at risk.

Slavery-like conditions exist in factories, fields and fishing boats, within private residences and a multitude of other places where avarice and corruption have overridden fundamental human values. Those enslaved are frequently subjected to abuse, both physical and psychological.

It brings shame on our world that the human rights of so many are denied in this way. Pope Francis is amongst those who call this 'a crime against humanity'. Surely, this vile crime cannot be funded and must not be funded, knowingly or unwittingly, by legitimate business or by our governments' use of our taxes? Surely, all supply chain offenders must face prosecution?

Today the risk that a product or service is tainted with slave labour somewhere in the supply chain occurs in almost all industries: from electronics and high-tech to automotive, steel, mining, agriculture, coffee, seafood, garments, textiles. The list is almost endless. All countries are affected.

Best estimates show 16 million people are victims in the supply chains of the legitimate economy, producing products or services we use on a daily basis. Governments may explicitly prohibit the violation of human rights but a collective blind eye is turned to 16 million people every day: the child in a coltan mine, the exploited woman in a sweatshop, the abused man on a fishing vessel.

Many issues divide public opinion: welfare, immigration, defence, tax. But in the case of modern slavery, agreement is total. All 193 UN member states have committed to eradicating child-slavery by 2025 and all modern slavery by 2030. This commitment means their governments must not contribute to the estimated US\$150 billion this crime generates every year. The reality is that across the world, all governments continue to purchase from supply chains that enslave people.

The time has come for our governments and political leaders to show decisive and determined leadership and to replace promises and speeches on the global stage with firm action. It is time to ensure that tax payer money no longer ends up in the hands of criminals profiteering from human rights violations. Controlling 80% of the world's trade, G20 governments must lead the world in taking action whereby they or any business they contract do not profit from this horrendous crime.

Without G20 governments reforming public procurement and directing the corporate sector in their countries and internationally, our generation will fail to eradicate modern slavery and condemn a future generation to the ongoing misery of exploitation and loss of human dignity.

Without delay, G20 commitments must move from words on a page to determined and monitored action. The time must be now, at this G20, for Declarations and Undertakings that:

- G20 Governments reaffirm their commitment to the eradication of modern slavery, human trafficking and forced labour in this generation as declared in SDG8.7
- G20 Governments order immediate reviews of their own procurement of goods and services to eliminate suppliers who cannot prove their supply chains are free of modern slavery
- G20 Governments cease contracting with corporations, organisations and individuals who do not comply and do not demonstrate with full transparency, on an annual basis, that they are exercising due diligence to slavery-proof their supply chains.
- G20 Governments acknowledge that their procurement is made with taxpayer funds and that their citizens deserve to know that their money will not be spent on these crimes through failure to ensure that goods and services are only procured from sources free from modern slavery and forced labour
- G20 Governments agree to call for and strongly support an independent international agency mandated to promote in all nations public procurement from supply lines free from modern slavery and forced labour. The proposed agency should also assist governments with programs and materials to educate their peoples and businesses about modern slavery, human trafficking and forced labour.

The Sustainable Development Goals were ratified in September 2015. Three years have passed yet there is no clear political strategy to achieve SDG8.7. Political strategy must necessarily begin with governments and their public procurement. Representing two-thirds of the world's population and nearly 90% of its economy, G20 Governments must lead by example.

Our generation must not face the accusation of indifference or negligence. Let it not be said, as Wilberforce said in 1791, "you may choose to look the other way but you can never again say you did not know". Doing too little cannot be an option. With will and organisation mobilized by G20 Governments, supported by civil society worldwide, we can meet the challenge of this vile crime and eradicate it by 2030.

The G20 Interfaith Forum has extensive outreach to all the major religious communities throughout the world and represents the moral convictions and ideals of these communities. On their behalf, the Interfaith Forum presents this urgent call to action to the G20.

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