Panel discussion October 13, 2020. Human trafficking and modern slavery (PD03) (KM notes)

Moderator: Dr. S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, Research Affiliate at Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace

and Security and Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University, USA

H.E. Amb. Ramón Blecua, Ambassador at Large for Mediation and Intercultural Dialogue of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Spain

Mr. Hani Dawah, Deputy for Media to the Senior Advisor of the Mufti of Egypt; member at the Executive Committee at Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation among Religious Institutions in the Arab World and KAICIID Fellow

Rev. Richard Sudworth, Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury and National Inter Religious Affairs Advisor and member of KAICIID Board of Directors

Mr. Kevin Hyland, former first independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner of the United Kingdom

Don. DDr. Michael H. Weninger, Member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at Vatican

The topic of human trafficking and modern slavery has been a priority for the G20 Interfaith Forum for the past three years, with specific policy recommendations presented to G20 leaders that have highlighted proposed G20 action as well as actions to be taken by religious communities. The panel discussion pursued many of the themes addressed in prior years, including those highlighted in the draft [policy brief.](https://www.g20interfaith.org/modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking/) Underlying themes in the discussion included repeated statements of moral outrage at the suffering of victims of human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery and thus the need for action and partnerships across sectors to end it, and the links between conflicts and trafficking and abuse of people across the world, thus highlighting the need for stronger action to prevent and resolve conflicts. The mixed roles of religious actors were addressed, including courageous and committed people who work from many directions to support victims, but also religious teachings, even in distorted forms, that contribute to the problem. A common theme was an emphasis on human dignity with many assertions of the inherent equal value of each person. Underage marriage was highlighted as an issue where religious leaders could make a difference. In sum, the issues of human trafficking and modern slavery extend from very global, transnational, interreligious aspects to very local manifestations, highlighting the shared responsibilities of global leaders and institutions and of individuals, who need to be aware and to contribute to action.

The moderator’s (Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana) introduction highlighted the urgency and global dimensions of the challenges presented by human trafficking and modern slavery, and the importance of religious roles. There are many worthwhile faith-linked initiatives, but they tend to be poorly coordinated so greater impact is possible. The panel focus should be on best practices and on ways to extend their impact.

Amb. Ramón Blecua highlighted the pervasive modern presence of modern slavery, a phenomenon he called staggering in its size and harm, and one that is growing in size and complexity. He stressed the links to migration, where an economic venture can turn into a ferocious trap. While conflict prevention and resolution are an increasing political focus, there is too little recognition that trafficking is a central, not a side effect, and that the drivers of conflict create new and perverse dynamics. Those in positions to benefit include organizations like Daesh and Boko Haram that use religious religious arguments to justify slavery. Interreligious dialogue and promotion of tolerance and new narratives need to be center stage in conflict resolution, and processes of prevention and protection need to work more effectively. Interreligious dialogue offers important avenues to address the phenomenon. He also highlighted United Nations and European Union roles, with the history of 20 years since the Palermo dialogue both inspirational and discouraging. Legal instruments need increasing focus, with particular emphasis on protection of women and children. Other aspects, however, including consumption patterns and simple awareness of the problem. His core message returned to the need for a sense of urgency and humanity, including awareness and taking responsibility for diverse roles,

Reverend Sudworth drew on the [Clewer Initiative of the Church of England](https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/) to address modern slavery, stressing the pervasive presence of the challenge even 200 years after slavery was abolished. The global dimensions are enormous but even in the UK there are 136,000 victims, often “hidden in plain sight in our communities”. The COE effort focuses on the community, starting with parishes, then to dioceses. Work can and needs to be done at the local level. Measures he highlighted included awareness and reinforcing networks that link knowledge and possibilities to act including focusing on support to victims. An App, for example, focuses on signs to watch for in car washes. Parishes and dioceses can link to government agencies, charities, and other faith networks. A goal is to encourage parishes and dioceses to learn from one another and work towards a common goal. Lesson plans for church schools aim to help children spot the signs of risk so they are not a prey. “Stories in the street” points to signs within communities of exploitation and vulnerabilities. Efforts continue, extending to the Anglican Communion worldwide, though the lockdown makes it all more difficult. The core message is that everyone is made in the image of God: God sees us and we can do so also.

Kevin Hyland highlighted international agreements (notably SDG 8.7[[1]](#footnote-1)), the Palermo agreement, and the designation of October 18 as a European Day to mark the suppression of modern slavery. He highlighted Pope Francis’ commitment to the challenge, during his address at the United Nations five years ago and in many other settings. Hyland, however, sees a regression since 2015, the more so now with the foundations of the world shaken to the core by COVID-19, which has revealed and accentuated clusters of vulnerability. This has terrible consequences for the most vulnerable, but even before it the benefits of growth failed to reach millions. The symptoms of trafficking and slavery are everywhere, with impunity a major problem. The challenge is accentuated by the fact that many elements of the problem are hidden, for example in trade transactions and garment production and trade. In looking to solutions, he emphasized that economic and social norms need to be restructured. When there are feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, or fear of failure, it is essential to reflect on the hundreds of millions who have suffered in darkness. The need is for more action, with strategies that remodel risk and accountability in ways that prevent trafficking and exploitation. History shows that times of the greatest tragedy often see the best response. There are great strengths to draw on including the courage of victims and those working to support them. In response to the question of what the G20 should do, he highlighted the need to use the international mechanisms that exist, including the reporting on Trafficking in Persons, critical friends, and others. Besides the classic instruments of prevention, protection, and prosecution he adds a fourth P, partnership. And the need is to address root causes which are greed and money, thus the profitability of trafficking. Recruitment fees are a good example of an area where action is possible and needed. We need a notion of tainted money, with the principle that no one should profit from crime. People of faith can be drivers for change, especially in the new world order that will arise from COVID.

Don. DDr. Michael H. Weninger highlighted the horrifying drama of trafficking and slavery with its brutality and use of threats and force. It involves the use of power for the purpose of exploitation. He also highlighted the links between migration and trafficking, as well as new forms of slavery that are part of the new economy. Clear and honest language is needed. Religious teachings are involved, largely wrong interpretations of religious practice, for terrorism. He cited the examples of women and children abused in suicide bombings, females under male dominance, and forced marriages, but also the acceptance of violence in various forms. Religion can be misused and instrumentalized, and this must be brought to the attention of political decision makers. Interreligious dialogue can augment the desire to find common action and play important roles in prevention. He highlighted the roles over decades of the Catholic Church, including statements during Vatican II, reaffirmed by several Popes since then. The Church has emphasized that people should never be mere tools for profit, which is an affront to fundamental values. Sexual exploitation is a fundamental affront to human dignity. He sees great hope in the common affirmation of principles in the 2019 agreement between Pope Francis and the Sheikh of Al-Azhar. They point to concrete steps to eliminate and prevent trafficking, including the liberation of constraints on women. Pope Francis, he said, never tires and his commitment is evident in the new encyclical, Frattelli Tutti, which has clear language in this regard. It is crucial to fight for the elimination of structures that allow the exploitation of people and their bondage, that allow it to be a lucrative business. The structures are economic, social, political, and even religious. The need is to join all existing forces to fight for a more just world. Indifference is a primary enemy. He pointed to the often silent efforts of those fighting the problem, including the women’s religious congregations. They deserve more appreciation from the Church and society, The essence of his plea is to act to ensure that where religion is manipulated and abused to offend the dignity of humanity in the worst ways, action is taken, so that the true essence of religion, which is to promote dignity and humanity, is upheld. Interreligious dialogue, of which KAICIID is a remarkable model, is needed.

Mr. Hani Dawah focused on the positives and negatives of modern technology which plays roles in efforts to put an end to human trafficking in all its forms. With 40 million people suffering, history, sociology, economics, and religion are all involved, with complex reasons behind trends. Wars, conflict, coercion, and religion are all involved. Smuggling, for example, is a flagrant human rights violation linked to many other factors. The problems are present in all countries and cultures. Religions including Islam have long fought to put an end to slavery and exploitation. A core issue is social inequality and the dignity of the human being is at the heart of the issue. Many religious texts. encourage Muslims not to use practices like slavery. There is, however, a need to correct some false ideas, including some surrounding new types of slavery that endanger all humanity. A specific evil is the marriage of young women, a heritage in Arab countries, but a misinterpretation of texts. This is happening among Syrian refugee and migrants. The position of the Muslim religion is against this practice, which has a negative impact on young girls. It is necessary to prohibit by law the marriage of minors. Child labor is a second major challenge; 26% of modern slaves are children, in households, industry, etc. Some ae kidnapped with some political party support. Daesh has exploited many children. In Egypt, many children 12-17 are working. Egypt has adopted laws and there are fatwas, but failures of implementation confirm that it is important that we fight against children working. The Prophet Mohammed was against it. As to suggestions for action, the religious academy and civil society should cooperate to increase awareness and fight against slavery. Religion, the academy, and civil society should meet and formulate concrete suggestions. Also important are international partnerships among religious institutions and periodic campaigns with official organizations. Schools and universities have important roles; the topic should be included in the curriculum, with courses on issues to increase awareness. Allocating charitable donations to Christian and Muslim organizations could enhance the fight against slavery. Social media may offer the most efficient means for younger generations.

**Several questions** about specific approaches and the ethics and practice of combatting trafficking and modern slavery were addressed.

Ambassador Blecua expanded on his recommendation to deepen work on conflict resolution to address trafficking and slavery. It is vital to go beyond the political and struggles for power, and thus concentrate on how conflicts impact the most vulnerable in communities. With gender a transversal issue in conflict resolution, trafficking and modern slavery are often a result of modern conflict. This needs to be integrated in projects. If we do not do better in conflict prevention, there will be more refugees, prey to traffickers. It is not only large criminal networks that are involved. For those in vulnerable positions, many including ourselves may take advantage, offering lower wages, for example. The problems do touch us all, and like it or not we are caught in dark webs of crime. The law and judiciary have roles to play but it is far better to have safety nets before problems arises.

Kevin Hyland addressed several questions turning about financial benefits and routes towards solutions. He focused on public procurement and other aspects of supply chains. The objective should be to eliminate illicit financial gains. Identifying those who profit, for example from sex trafficking, needs to look to property owners, for example. Eliminating recruitment fees is possible and desirable. All work should come with dignity.

The panel responded to questions about why prosecutions and convictions are so low, confirming that the vast majority of cases are not prosecuted. There is an urgent need to upgrade and refocus processes.

Panel members addressed issues for religious structures. They highlighted interreligious dialogue as a positive route that should also include constructive confrontation. Highlighting the religious related roots of these crimes is vital, including their cultural roles. Institutionalized injustice is a problem.

Among solutions highlighted were centralized hot lines and mechanisms to assure that buying is ethical.

Another is building networks to identify and support groups hiding in plain sight. Relationships with statutory agencies can be effective.

Failings in communities to protect and support need to be addressed, as all spur each other on to do good. The idea is to give every single person dignity.

Kevin Hyland pointed to the Santa Marta group as an example of how very local concerns and initiatives can take on a global dimension, in this case with the full support of Pope Francis. It began with a meeting in a church hall just north of London. There is remarkable connectivity in faith. Communities, starting with the sharing of best practice. Moral leadership focused on delivering on promises is a driver for action.

*Panel Description*: The horrors of human trafficking and different forms of modern slavery cause deep suffering to many who have little capacity to defend themselves. International law, police action and national efforts address some facets of the complex phenomenon but far more needs to be done. Strong religious voices give a high priority to this topic. An array of religious initiatives addresses the issues, but coordination among them and with secular actors is generally poor. The commitment to SDG target 8.7, to eradicate modern slavery, frames this round table which looks at strengthening both moral leadership and practical means to bring these scourges to an end so that relevant corporations, organizations and individuals exercise their due diligence to slavery-proof their supply chains.

*Guiding questions:*

# What are next steps as religious actors press to end modern slavery? Can best practices be expanded?

* What partnerships can be reinforced to bolster action including with business and public authorities?
* How can G20 work with religious organizations to reflect the issue’s priority and urgency?

1. Target 8.7 calls for taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 to end child labour in all its forms. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)