



# **A Global Commission to Transform Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking**

**Policy Reflections Briefing 2023**

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On 6 October 2023, a high level Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking was launched. This exciting development has the potential to become a game-changer, generating decisive global commitment to end modern slavery once and for all.

**Hope for Justice offers its full support to the Commission. We call on governments, the UN, other intergovernmental institutions, leaders with lived experience of modern slavery, NGOs, wider civil society, academia and the private sector globally to seize this historic opportunity.**

**We urge the Global Commission to fully include leaders with lived experience of slavery and all other key actors at all stages of setting up and functioning, to ensure a truly global, diverse, and inclusive composition and a sector-wide consensus for a legitimate mandate to end modern slavery.**

This reflections paper offers transformative, far-reaching recommendations that we invite the Commission to explore. These include:

1. Elevate the global political commitment at the highest level of governmental and intergovernmental organisations' representation, and the private sector; with full and meaningful worldwide, regional and local survivor and civil society involvement.
2. Recommend and provide guidance to set up a sole intergovernmental entity ensuring global governance for coordinated policies on modern slavery and human trafficking.
3. Recommend and lay down a strong global accountability mechanism overseeing the implementation of the commitments and agreements made by governments, companies and civil society arising from the work of the Global Commission.
4. Advocate for, and articulate the setting up of, a dedicated funding mechanism with periodic replenishment by governments and the private sector to fund the global response at scale, with a focus on supporting survivor-led organisations and wider civil society.
5. Help develop robust research and evidence on critical gaps and emerging issues to better understand 'what works' in preventing and responding to modern slavery.
6. Provide rapid response guidelines with and for international agencies, NGOs and governments to help address the increased risks of human trafficking due to humanitarian emergencies, and forced displacement fuelled by armed conflict and climate change.

# Modern slavery today: context and global commitments

Human trafficking and modern slavery are a crime and a human rights violation that attracts almost unanimous condemnation by states, institutions, and citizens around the world. The campaign to end slavery was among the first modern global human rights movements in the nineteenth century, focused first on the international slave trade and then the institution of slavery itself. The movement has lived on to the present time to respond to contemporary manifestations of slavery.

As of today, 181 states are party to the main international treaty to end human trafficking: the 2000 UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (often referred to as the Palermo Protocol). There are many other global and regional legal instruments pledging to tackle various aspects of human trafficking and modern slavery.

In 2023, nearly 50 million people are estimated to live in slavery globally,<sup>1</sup> more than ever before in history.<sup>2</sup> This represents a rise of approximately 20% since the previous iteration of the same study using similar methodology five years earlier – as such, it is evident that the world is failing to address modern slavery.<sup>3</sup> Unlike other issues in global human rights and sustainable development, the anti-slavery sector lacks global resources, coordination, governance, and systems of accountability to monitor progress and foster collaboration among states, the private sector and civil society.

Target 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals commits states to ‘take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of all forms of child labour’. This target should galvanise global action against modern slavery. Yet, the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 does not refer at all to any progress made to eradicate modern slavery.<sup>4</sup> The UN summit to assess progress against the SDG goals on 18-19 September 2023 was meant to be “...a moment of unity to provide a renewed impetus and accelerated actions for reaching the SDGs”.<sup>5</sup> But the summit did not discuss progress to end modern slavery and human trafficking.<sup>6</sup>

## Setting up a Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

In 2022, former UK Prime Minister, Lady Theresa May promoted the creation of a Global Commission on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery. The Office of Theresa May commissioned the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC)

to conduct a scoping study (Scoping Study) to examine the case for establishing such a commission. The Scoping Study has informed the initial terms of reference of the Commission.<sup>7</sup>

The Global Commission has the potential to be a much-needed game-changer for the global response to modern slavery and human trafficking. It could elevate the global political commitment to a higher level and galvanize resources to coordinate an unprecedented response that finally ends modern slavery.

## **We call for a Commission that is truly global, which embeds civil society and survivor leadership in all their diversity.**

We fully endorse the Scoping Study's proposed principles to design the Global Commission: "globality; independence; centrality of lived experience of human trafficking and modern slavery; international collaboration; long term ambition; and looking beyond the 'usual suspects'". The Scoping Study claims that "the international modern slavery field has a stark power imbalance: funds and decision-making almost exclusively flow from the Global North. If a commission is to be truly global, it must ensure all regions have the power to influence decisions ... Given civil society organisations' substantial experience, expertise and influence, they should be embedded in the configuration of a Global Commission."

For the Global Commission to be legitimate and representative, it has to embed a truly global representation of civil society organisations that operate at local, regional and global level and a strong global involvement of leaders with lived experience of modern slavery. The Commission should establish a transparent representation and engagement mechanism to include survivor and other civil society leaders across regions, faith and cultural backgrounds, including those who have experienced the many manifestations of modern slavery in the world.

## **Recommendations for the remit of the Global Commission**

This briefing outlines key elements that we believe should be part of the remit of the Global Commission for it to be an effective mechanism that turns the tide against the rise in modern slavery once and for all. These recommendations build on and go further than the Scoping Study.

## 1. Political commitment at the highest level

The main objective of the Global Commission is to elevate the global political commitment to end modern slavery from a current technical level to a higher level of decision making. The Scoping Study calls for the future Global Commission to “Bring together figures of international renown to raise the profile of modern slavery and galvanise action by states and other stakeholders.”

There have been some attempts to elevate the global political commitment to end modern slavery. One of the most recent was the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.<sup>8</sup> The Call was launched on 19th September 2017 during the 72nd Meeting of the UN General Assembly and reaffirmed states' commitments to end forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking, and the worst forms of child labour by 2030.

The UN Security Council set a precedent in 2022 by imposing sanctions on armed groups and criminal networks in Haiti for several crimes and human rights abuses, including “forcible recruitment of children”, “trafficking in persons”, and “sexual slavery”.<sup>9</sup>

*There are multiple examples of other human rights and development issues being elevated at the level of periodic political declarations at the UN General Assembly level, with specific commitments and targets (UN General Assembly Special Sessions on AIDS), and at the level of the UN Security Council with periodic resolutions including targeted measures against parties to conflicts using children as soldiers (UNSC Resolutions on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict).*

The Commission could recommend the creation of a periodic forum for reflection, monitoring and commitment on cooperation to end human trafficking and modern slavery at the highest political level and explore periodic scheduled sessions. This could happen at the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, or other intergovernmental fora with global political representation at the highest level.

## 2. Global governance and action

The Scoping Study calls for the Global Commission to complement the numerous existing fora for dialogue and cooperation, such as Alliance 8.7 and the UN’s Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT). In our view, these fora are useful but require greater coordination, complementarity and robust governance and accountability mechanisms to monitor commitments and ensure effective global responses.

These initiatives are often restricted in terms of resources, geographic scope or mandate.

There are various intergovernmental agencies dealing with some aspects of modern slavery and human trafficking, including coordination, intelligence exchange and training. One of the most advanced in governance terms is the International Labour Organization (ILO), which provides guidelines for the implementation of ILO conventions. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is the custodian of the Palermo Protocol. There are other dynamic regional intergovernmental organisations, such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe, which promote collaboration among government and between the public and private sectors and civil society.

However, there is not a unified system of global governance to set policies to end modern slavery based on evidence and good practice.

*An example of an effective global governance system is the response to HIV and AIDS, which has a specific joint UN programme (UNAIDS). UNAIDS leads the global effort to end AIDS as a public health threat. UNAIDS provides the strategic direction, advocacy, coordination, and technical support needed to catalyse and connect leadership from governments, the private sector, and communities to deliver life-saving HIV services.<sup>10</sup>*

The Global Commission could consider recommending and providing guidance for the creation of a unique intergovernmental and multisectoral agency (including survivor leadership, private sector, academia and civil society) on modern slavery and human trafficking, which would set out the global governance systems for the global response to modern slavery and human trafficking, generating good practice and setting up or coordinating the various regional and global policies, coalitions, and initiatives, rather than just complementing the existing ones.

### 3. Global accountability

Monitoring and accountability mechanisms for the implementation of commitments made by states and the private sector as regards to human trafficking and modern slavery are scarce and limited. Most modern-slavery-related treaties lack specific accountability mechanisms. For example, the Palermo Protocol does not have a treaty body to scrutinise its implementation, although some regional treaties do have such bodies.<sup>11</sup> As for the private sector, for now most initiatives are self-regulated, although there is increasing due diligence legislation with various levels of scrutiny for corporations on human rights (including forced labour in the supply chain) and environmental impact.

There are regional intergovernmental institutions with strong enforcement mechanisms for international treaties, such as the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) in relation to the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings.<sup>12</sup> However, at the global level, the reporting and accountability mechanisms on human trafficking and modern slavery seem to reflect the apparent disorganisation and lack of coordination to foster global collaboration and the myriad of initiatives that sometimes compete for attention, each having limited influence and decision power.<sup>13</sup>

*Several relevant UN Special Rapporteurs and other special procedures monitor some aspects of modern slavery to great impact, although some areas of their mandate overlap with each other or with equivalent regional instruments.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, globally, most of the international scrutiny is embedded in the work of more general human rights-related treaty bodies (for example, the Committee Against Torture, and the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council). This means that modern slavery issues compete with other human rights issues for attention at the most important global human rights fora.*

*Several UN treaty bodies provide thorough, targeted scrutiny on the States' implementation of treaties focusing on specific human rights issues, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on Migrant Workers and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances.*

*A good precedent of a Commission leading to decisive accountability and action mechanisms is the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). The ICISS was set up as a collaborative platform between governments and philanthropy. It addressed the debate between humanitarian interventions and state sovereignty, including the normative principle of Responsibility to Protect (RtP) binding all governments to protect their own populations. RtP was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005 and it has been invoked by the UN Security Council on a number of occasions to underpin UN peacekeeping interventions, including in Darfur (Sudan) and Libya.<sup>15</sup>*

The Commission could explore and recommend a simplified monitoring, accountability and action mechanism that provides a single point-of-entry to monitor the implementation of responsibilities by governments, especially the Palermo Protocol, and develops binding regulative frameworks on private companies. The Commission should explore the conditions for such mechanisms to foster collaboration and transparency and trigger action against those actors who are not complying with their obligations.

## 4. Global funding

The funding for the global response to human trafficking and modern slavery is woefully insufficient to address an issue that affects a growing number of people across the world. While there are an estimated 50 million people living in conditions of modern slavery,<sup>16</sup> there is no global funding mechanism to address modern slavery and human trafficking.

There are several funding initiatives. The Programme to End Modern Slavery (PEMS), run by the US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Office, has an annual appropriation for grants to combat human trafficking of around US\$25 million.<sup>17</sup> The US government also supports the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), which received less than US\$24 million in 2021.<sup>18</sup>

In 2018, the UK government committed to spend £200 million (approximately US\$245 million) to combat modern slavery globally,<sup>19</sup> split over a number of years via aid spending and funds managed variously by the Home Office, the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the former Department for International Development (DFID). This included the four-year £33.5m Modern Slavery Fund, of which £11m was specifically allocated as an Innovation Fund to support projects taking innovative approaches. A review of the Fund stated: "Despite achieving some impressive results at the output level which have changed lives for thousands of people in just a few years, a £33.5m fund cannot realistically be expected to deliver transformational impact across four ambitious pillars in almost fifteen countries, most of which are fragile."<sup>20</sup>

The UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Modern Slavery (UN Slavery Fund), with voluntary contributions from UN member states, received less than US\$900,000 in 2022.<sup>21</sup>

These are very small funding pots to address the global dimension of modern slavery.

*The low level of funding to combat modern slavery contrasts starkly with global funding for other critical issues. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria is the biggest funding mechanism to fight these three diseases. It collects contributions from governments and private philanthropic organisations and provides grants worth over US\$5.2 billion a year.<sup>22</sup> In the case of AIDS, there are several other substantial funders, including the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which disburses over US\$6.9 billion a year of US government funding to countries and organisations addressing HIV/AIDS.<sup>23</sup> There are many more funding initiatives to prevent new HIV infections and provide lifelong treatment for the approximately 38.4 million people living with HIV.<sup>24</sup>*



The Global Commission could draft the constituent parts of, and advocate for the establishment of, a global funding mechanism fostering high impact and evidence-based collaborative interventions involving cross-border collaboration between public and private institutions, survivor-led and survivor-centred NGOs, and community based organisations.

The Commission could convene a founding core of committed governments and private philanthropic institutions. The first replenishment of such a fund should aim to pledges above US\$1 billion in the next three years.

## 5. Research and evidence

The Scoping Study recommends that the Global Commission build the evidence and knowledge base on forced labour and other types of exploitation of vulnerable people. We agree with the study that the Commission should support research to understand risks in the supply chain and help to establish criteria for a robust binding regulations on companies cutting across various national and regional jurisdictions across the supply chain.

Modern slavery is a global illicit business that is constantly evolving. While traffickers are taking full advantage of globalisation and advances in technology, those responding to these crimes often lack the necessary understanding, coordination and intelligence exchange.

We urge the Global Commission to foster research, evaluation and evidence generation on the key elements of the evolution of the current landscape of modern slavery. This includes the connection between climate change and modern slavery, the growing use of digital and online technologies to trick and exploit people into slavery, and the structural factors that lead to exploitation and re-exploitation, including gender inequality and social and economic inequalities.

The Global Commission should be a recipient of evidence-based good practice to address particularly under-served aspects of the response to modern slavery, including the poor rates of identification of victims and of successful prosecution or traffickers; the absence of survivor-centred criminal justice frameworks and independent survivor-led advocacy and comprehensive support systems; and the lack of mental health provision for people with lived experience of modern slavery, among others.

## 6. Rapid response guidelines

There are more displaced people in the world than ever before: more than 110 million people have been forcibly displaced by armed conflict, social and political instability, climate change and natural disasters.

Humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people are critical contributors to vulnerability to trafficking into modern slavery.<sup>25</sup> Hope for Justice has witnessed this growing connection in our frontline programmes in Uganda and Ethiopia, and recently in the UK too as we have worked on the exposure to human trafficking of Ukrainian people who fled the Russian invasion. Yet, humanitarian responses are proving extremely inadequate to prevent and address human trafficking.

*The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) brings together 15 leading aid charities pooling their resources and coordinating the response. There are also 'clusters' for humanitarian responses bringing UN agencies and humanitarian organisations together to coordinate humanitarian crisis responses. Yet, these coordinating entities very rarely have anti-human trafficking organisation in them, and there are no standardised guidelines and operation procedures to help adapt and coordinate the human trafficking aspect of humanitarian responses.*

The Global Commission could set up the components of dedicated rapid response procedures and coordination that include international agencies, NGOs, and governments to embed the human trafficking response into the existing coordinated humanitarian response to the displacement of people due to disasters, conflict, and climate change and that provide guidance on the intersection between humanitarian and human trafficking responses.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization, Walk Free and International Organization of Migration '[Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#)', accessed on 10 September 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Walk Free, '[Global Slavery Index](#)', accessed on 2 September 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Restoy E., R. Hartley, A. Hewitt, '[How to end modern-day slavery in the age of deglobalization](#)' | [World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](#), Hope for Justice & Slavery Free Alliance, accessed on 4 September, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, '[Global Sustainable Development Report](#)', Unedited Version, 14 June, 2023, accessed on 30 August, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> US Secretary General, António Guterres, '[SDG Summit 2023 | United Nations](#)', accessed on 2 September, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> UN, SDG Summit, 2023, '[Programme SDG Summit | United Nations](#)', accessed on 4 September, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Hilland A., M. Biggs, and S. Kerr, '[Assessing the case for a Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking](#)', PEC, July 2022.

<sup>8</sup> '[A call to action to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking](#)', accessed on 8 June 2023, launched on the 19th September 2017 during the 72nd Meeting of the UN General Assembly.

<sup>9</sup> Our World, '[New UN Security Council Sanctions for Haiti Strengthen Fight Against Modern Slavery](#)', 14 November 2022, accessed on 27 June 2023.

<sup>10</sup> UNAIDS is the AIDS program of six UN agencies: UNICEF; the UN Development Programme (UNDP); the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings incorporates a monitoring mechanism: the Group of Experts on Against trafficking in human beings (GRETA).

<sup>12</sup> Council of Europe, '[About GRETA' Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(coe.int\)](#)', accessed on 7 September 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Including the OSCE-sponsored Alliance against Trafficking in Persons, the Global Plan of Action against Trafficking, the UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), and Alliance 8.7.

<sup>14</sup> These include the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and its consequences, and the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

<sup>15</sup> UN Office on Genocide Prevention & Responsibility to Protect: '[The Responsibility to Protect](#)', accessed on 16 May 2023.

<sup>16</sup> International Labour Organization, '[50 million people worldwide in modern slavery](#)', accessed on 8 May, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> US Department of State, '[TIP Office Funding Opportunity](#). Common Questions and Answers (PEMS)', accessed on 8 September 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, '[Financial Statements, Years ended December 2021 and 2020](#)'. Accessed on 7 May, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> GOV.UK Development Tracker, '[Modern Slavery Fund](#)'. Last updated 9 January, 2023 and accessed on 8 September 2023.

<sup>20</sup> FCDO, '[Modern Slavery Fund review \(2019-2021\)](#)', accessed on 7 May 2023.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Voluntary Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, '[Contributions 2022](#)', accessed on 10 May 2023.

<sup>22</sup> The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, '[Global Fund Board Hails Record-Breaking Seventh Replenishment Final Outcome of US\\$15.7 Billion](#)', accessed on 9 May, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> PEPFAR, '[The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief \(PEPFAR\)](#)', accessed on 9 May, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> World Health Organisation, '[HIV and AIDS](#)', accessed on 8 May, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> UN High Commission for Refugees, '[Refugee Statistics](#)', [Forced displacement](#), Accessed on 4 September, 2023.

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