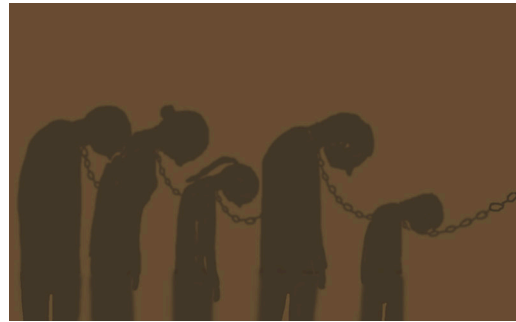


# Abolish modern slavery!

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**There are 45.8 million slaves in the world today according to the 2016 Global Slavery Index, nearly four times the total number of Africans sold in the Americas during the four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade. Modern servitude goes under a variety of names such as human trafficking or compulsory labour, fulfilling the prophecy of the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, himself a former slave, that slavery “will call itself by yet another name; and you and I and all of us had better wait and see what new form this old monster will assume, in what new skin this old snake will come forth.”**

One new form is child trafficking in India. It’s designed to meet the demand for household help from the expanding middle class by taking advantage of supply from impoverished rural communities. Deepti Minch was sold to a family in Delhi. “My life was tough. I worked from six in the morning until midnight. I had to cook meals, clean the house, take care of the children and massage the legs of my employers before going to bed.”

Child labour is one of the worst forms of abuse. In the Indian case, the OECD has partnered with Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi on a range of issues related to promoting children’s welfare and well-being. Mr Satyarthi and the grassroots movement founded by him, *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* (Save the Childhood Movement), have liberated more than 84,000 children from exploitation and developed a successful model for their education and rehabilitation. Juliane Kippenberg of Human Rights Watch describes how children have been injured and killed in mining accidents, suffered poisoning from mercury used in gold processing, and developed respiratory disease from exposure to dust. She welcomes another OECD initiative to develop practical actions to help identify,

mitigate and account for the risks of child labour in the mineral supply chains, like carrying out independent third-party audits on due diligence practices at smelters and refiners.

The issues go far beyond mining. Modern slaves may be sewing the clothes you wear, growing the food you eat, and producing the gadgets that keep you entertained and informed. Around two million of them are working for states or rebel groups, and can become trapped in a vicious circle in which militia fight for control of precious resources such as minerals, while the profits

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from controlling mines fund further conflict. Consumers, business leaders, and policymakers all have a duty to tackle this crime. And we have the tools to do so.

The 2010 US Dodd-Frank Act obliges public companies to report on products containing minerals that may be benefiting armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The UK government recognised the scale and seriousness of the problem by passing the 2015 Modern Slavery Act. Prime Minister Theresa May set up a government task force on modern slavery and appointed an Anti-Slavery Commissioner. In an article promising that her government will lead the way in defeating modern slavery, the Prime Minister highlights the human suffering behind the headlines: “people are enduring experiences that are simply horrifying in their inhumanity. Vulnerable people who have travelled long distances believing they were heading for legitimate jobs are finding they have been duped, forced into hard labour, and then locked up and abused.”

The UK legislators are well aware of the complexity of the task facing them, and produced a Practical Guide for companies on transparency in supply chains that recommends the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). They point out that although the OECD Guidelines are not specifically focused on modern slavery (although the Due Diligence Guidelines do include it), “they provide principles and standards for responsible business conduct in areas such as employment and industrial relations and human rights which may help organisations when seeking to respond to or prevent modern slavery.” Ending slavery is made even more difficult by the size and complexity of supply chains that make it hard to identify who is responsible for ensuring rights are respected at all the locations involved in production. Workers are often employed by subcontractors or sub-subcontractors of MNEs in their own country, and unfortunately it may take a catastrophe like the 2013 collapse of garment factories at Rana Plaza in Bangladesh to set change in motion. Following that tragedy, the OECD developed a Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector. This guidance, elaborated through an intense multi-stakeholder process, supports a common understanding of due diligence and responsible supply chain management in the sector. One of the most notable

features is that it doesn't allow multinationals to use the failings of local contractors as an excuse: "Enterprises should...seek to prevent or mitigate an adverse impact where they have not contributed to that impact, when the impact is nevertheless directly linked to their operations, products or services by a business relationship."

It doesn't always take a big disaster to change things though. The OECD and FAO produced due diligence guidance for the agricultural sector that will, among other things, help newcomers to the sector, such as institutional investors, deal with ethical dilemmas and uphold internationally agreed standards of responsible business conduct, notably in markets with weak governance and insecure land rights. For instance the guidance recognises that regardless of the legal framework in which an operation takes place, indigenous people often have customary or traditional rights based on their relationship to the land, their culture and socio-economic status.

It's easy to see how workers would benefit from improved conditions and why consumers would choose ethically-sourced products. But it makes good business sense too. The evidence on company performance shows that the ones that behave responsibly towards their employees, the environment, and society do better than the rest.

Modern slavery is a highly internationalised affair, and to end it we need to reinforce international co-ordination and co-operation. As more countries and sectors step up the fight against slavery and other abuses, our experience with the MNE Guidelines and Due Diligence Guidance is likely to be called upon increasingly. We advocate the approach pioneered in the apparel industry where we work with industry, government, worker organisations, and civil society to elaborate strategies and we have to work together to implement them. We can all learn from each other and use our shared knowledge to expose slavery and help to abolish it. As Frederick Douglass said, "It flourishes best where it meets no reproving frowns, and hears no condemning voices."

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