

Ending Slavery Forum
27th March 2018
Chambers Pavilion, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
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Federal Member for Dunkley

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and thank you to Reverend Pickard and the ACC&C for hosting this wonderful event. As has already been noted, Sunday was the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and while we remember the victims, we also must reflect on their legacy. Sadly, today it is estimated that there are more people in slavery globally than at any point during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Wiping out the Trans-Atlantic slave trade took strong political will at the time, and to address the problem of modern slavery requires similar strength.

In Australia we have built that political will. Twelve months ago, the former Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, referred the Inquiry into Establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. The Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee, which I chair, spearheaded this Inquiry, which received over two hundred public submissions and undertook ten days of hearings across four Australian cities.

We received testimony and submissions were both informative and, at times, harrowing. We received statements from victims, both here in Australia and internationally, which showed the horror and trauma that is inflicted by these crimes. This included victims of orphanage trafficking and some of the worst forms of child labour in South-East Asia, as well as some who were forced into debt bondage here in Australia.

But we also received a range of information and analysis from both Australian and global leaders across business, civil society and academia who had a range of proposals and suggestions regarding both legislation and policy. The expertise ranged from leading lawyers to supply chain consultants to groups active in fighting modern slavery at a grassroots level, assisting victims and reporting hotspots to authorities.

The far-reaching testimony all fed into the committee's final report, *Hidden in Plain Sight*. It proved to be a comprehensive examination of our legislative and policy landscape on modern slavery. Numerous issues were raised by submitters, including the risk of slavery in business supply chains, questions around orphanages in South-East Asia and operational activity by investigative agencies here in Australia.

The final report issued 49 recommendations concerning numerous aspects of our response and how we should further improve our actions. These recommendations included the creation of a Modern Slavery Act, the development of a modern slavery reporting scheme for business, changes to some of our policy and enforcement frameworks and the formation of an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner as a central point for Australia's response.

The report and its recommendations have been lauded by civil society groups involved in fighting modern slavery. The Law Council of Australia, Stop the Traffick, and the Salvation Army all praised the report's recommendations. It was noted by some that, should the committee's recommendations be enacted, Australia's response to modern slavery would be world-leading.

But most importantly, the Government has paid attention. Before the final report was handed down, a discussion paper proposing reporting requirements for business was issued, outlining a policy platform as well as the opportunity for public feedback on the issue. Furthermore, since the report's publication, there have already been shifts in policy, with the expansion of assistance to victims of forced marriage, as well as the creation of the Smart Volunteering program through DFAT to encourage Australians to offer their services overseas in a way that best benefits those communities. Furthermore, the Government has announced that a Modern Slavery Act is on the table. While the final product is still being negotiated, there will be legislation before Parliament this year. I have been working closely with the Assistant Minister for Home Affairs, the Honorable Alex Hawke MP, to help deliver a piece of legislation which reflects what Australia needs to change or create to address modern slavery.

In considering the report, there are some recommendations which I believe are crucial to the formulation of a Modern Slavery Act. Firstly, the reporting mechanism, where businesses which turn over more than 50 million dollars annually are required to issue a modern slavery statement. This would ensure that both large and medium Australian businesses would be engaging with what the risks of modern slavery are, through seeking to address them through their procurement systems as they trade internationally. It would also provide a similar reporting requirement to the United Kingdom, creating unity across international jurisdictions.

This reporting requirement should also be bolstered by the creation of a publicly available central repository of all modern slavery statements. This requirement will provide a central point for all modern slavery statements, creating transparency when assessing the quality of reporting from different businesses. This repository would also help to create a culture of best practice, as firms can work towards best practice and improve as they see how other businesses address modern slavery. Additionally, the creation of an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner is crucial in addressing modern slavery. The idea of a Commissioner is based upon the United Kingdom, which has created an independent office for consulting on modern slavery. The current commissioner, Mr Kevin Hyland, addressed the subcommittee directly on the impact he is having across the UK, from the creation of information for frontline officials to assisting business in understanding the intricacies of delivering their reports.

An Australian commissioner would have the independence to work with business and NGOs to ensure that the best information is available to those addressing modern slavery. They would also have the freedom to identify flaws in our response through a review process every three years, to guarantee that Australia would remain a world leader in addressing modern slavery.

Moreover, such a commissioner would also assist with the challenges in assisting victims and prosecuting perpetrators here in Australia. The inquiry identified difficulties in Australia's enforcement response to modern slavery, particularly in attitudes and identification of victims here. While we recognise that the agencies responsible are doing all they can to effectively enforce the existing laws, an Independent Commissioner would also be able to provide oversight to their operations and help to safeguard victims when they are at their most vulnerable.

These challenges include the risks within our own visa system. While we must continue to ensure a robust visa system, there have been certain risks created around particular visas that need to be addressed. In particular, we heard from Rosie Ayliffe, whose daughter Mia was killed in a hostel in rural Queensland in 2016 while she was on a working holiday visa here. Mia's friend Tom, who was also killed, was unable to leave the hostel because of a debt accumulated due to lack of work. There were also reports of serious exploitation of working holidaymakers in similar situations to Tom, by both hostels and farms directly.

As such, the committee recommended changes to try and reduce the risk of exploitation in Australian visa arrangements, particularly where that is tied to visa requirements. Our evidence heard that there was significant risk of unscrupulous businesses exploiting travellers in these situations, whether here on a working holiday visa or potentially working illegally. By changing some aspects of certain visa conditions, we can reduce the risk of exploitation of travellers here in Australia.

These changes represent a small sample of what should be adjusted to help stamp out modern slavery. But our response cannot end there. The criminals who continue to exploit innocent and vulnerable people for financial gain are both intelligent and ruthless. As a society, we assumed that slavery was wiped out in the 19th century. We were wrong, and for the rights of every victim since, we cannot afford to become complacent again. The Modern Slavery Act must just be the beginning, and we must remain vigilant to ensure we are doing everything to help victims of these crimes. There is no easy solution to modern slavery, but that means we must continue to work to address every aspect of it. I look forward to continuing to work with everyone in this room to continue to shine a light on slavery, both here and around the world. Thank you.