



## **COMMUNICATION ON ENGAGEMENT (COE)**

### **ANTI-SLAVERY INTERNATIONAL**

**Period covered by this COE: From January 2019 to December 2021**

#### **Part I. Statement of Continued Support by the Chief Executive:**

24<sup>th</sup> January 2022

I am pleased to confirm that Anti-Slavery International reaffirms its support to the United Nations Global Compact and its Ten Principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-Corruption.

This is our Communication on Engagement with the United Nations Global Compact. We welcome feedback on its contents. In this Communication of Engagement, we describe the actions that our organization has taken to support the UN Global Compact and its Principles as suggested for Civil Society Organisation like ourselves. We also commit to sharing this information with our stakeholders through our Annual Reports and Annual Reviews, published on our website, [Annual Review 2018-19](#), [Annual Review 2019-20](#), [Annual Accounts 2019](#), [Annual Accounts 2020](#), which form the source material for the information provided in this Communication.

Sincerely yours,

Jasmine O'Connor OBE  
Chief Executive Officer, Anti-Slavery International

#### **Part II. Description of Actions:**

##### **TACKLING FORCED AND CHILD LABOUR IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS**

Modern supply chains are complex and create conditions where slavery can thrive, aided by the continual pressure to drive down costs and deliver shareholder profits. At least 16 million women, men and children are in forced labour in the private sector worldwide, with many slavery-produced

goods consumed in the Global North. Addressing slavery practices in global supply chains is one of the central pillars of Anti-Slavery's work and continued to be a key focus of our work in the period between 2019 - 2021.

- Throughout this period we continued to deliver our supply chains consultancy work supporting UK-based companies to fulfil their requirements under the Modern Slavery Act. We encouraged businesses to go beyond mere 'compliance', aiming to engage with businesses longer term as a 'critical friend', advising them on how to undertake due diligence in their supply chains and develop appropriate business strategies. Through this work we supported companies to review and improve their on-the ground practices, identifying risk areas and taking steps to prevent exploitation.
- Current laws and voluntary "corporate social responsibility" are not enough to end slavery abuses in global supply chains; national and international laws that make businesses legally responsible for preventing human rights abuses in their supply chains and provide access to justice for victims are needed. Anti-Slavery has been at the forefront of pushing for corporate mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence (mHREDD) legislation at the EU in recent years.

Throughout 2019-21 we continued to promote a systematic EU-wide approach to the eradication of forced and child labour in global supply chains. We helped develop an active coalition of 100+ NGO partners working to secure mHREDD and secured the first business champions to publicly advocate for mHREDD. The strong, strategic alliances we have helped to build within EU institutions contributed to a major milestone in this work when, in April 2020, the European Commission announced its intention to introduce mHREDD. The European Council in December 2020 and the European Parliament in March 2021 also called for due diligence legislation.

We worked with partners from producing countries heavily affected by corporate abuses to ensure their voices are considered in the debate and the new legislation is fit for purpose. We supported them to learn more about the developments in the EU and to meet directly with EU policy makers to influence the new law's shape and scope. We also collaborated with Global Witness and Clean Clothes Campaign, in partnership with Avaaz, to support organisations to submit into the European Commission's Consultation on mHREDD. Through this campaign and others' work, over half a million people called upon the EU to introduce a strong EU law to hold companies accountable, including 700 civil society groups, trade unions and academic institutions from around the world.

- We also continued our work to call upon the UK government to strengthen supply chain legislation. In September 2020, we welcomed the UK Government's announcement to strengthen the UK Modern Slavery Act. However, we do not consider these improvements enough to prevent forced labour in UK supply chains and continue to work in coalition with civil society across the UK to call for stronger laws.
- Anti-Slavery continued to raise-awareness and push for both Governments and companies to take proactive steps to end human rights abuses in their supply chains more broadly, too. After over a decade of campaigning alongside our partners in the Cotton Campaign, we have seen some progress towards reform of the state-imposed forced labour system in Uzbekistan. As part of the coalition, we actively engaged with the Uzbek government to push for full reform and started to develop a framework to prevent forced labour, empower workers and farmers and to encourage sourcing from Uzbekistan once again. In March 2021, cotton workers formed Uzbekistan's first independent trade union. There has been limited progress in Turkmenistan, but we continued to work with our partners in the Cotton Campaign to raise awareness and push for reform.

- We also helped to convene an emerging coalition of human and labour rights organisations and trade unions to develop strategies to pressure major brands and retailers to end the use of state-imposed forced labour of people from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and to engage governments and multilateral organisations to pressure the Chinese government to end the persecution of Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples. 72 Uyghur rights groups and over 100 civil society organisations launched the End Uyghur Forced Labour Coalition seeking brand commitments to cut all ties with suppliers implicated in forced labour and end all sourcing from the Uyghur Region, and to engage governments and multilateral organisations to introduce relevant laws and policy. The US Government has introduced an import ban on cottons and tomatoes from the region; and in the UK, two parliamentary enquiries were launched calling on businesses as witnesses. By May 2021, the Coalition was endorsed by over 350 organisations from around the world, and seven fashion brands had publicly committed to the Call to Action, as well as private commitments from large global brands
- Since July 2019 we have been implementing an initiative in support of the 45,000+ migrant workers employed in export-oriented factories in Mauritius, the majority from Bangladesh, Madagascar, and India. Many find themselves trapped in situations of debt bondage and forced labour, having paid extortionate recruitment fees whilst being deceived about the terms and conditions of employment in Mauritius. The project aims to reduce migrant workers' vulnerability to exploitation throughout the employment cycle, working with grass-roots workers organisations, UK and global business buyers and Mauritian suppliers to provide vulnerable migrant workers with support pre and post-departure, focussing both on ethical recruitment and decent work practices and including the development of a workers' rights app to provide migrant workers with information about their rights and access to a complaints mechanism.

In 2019-20, the project enabled the Confederation of Workers of Public and Private Sectors (CTSP, Mauritius), to set up a Migrant Resource Centre, which had provided support to 370 workers and delivered awareness-raising activities to 98 workers by the end of the year. We also developed awareness-raising and training materials for pre-departure training in Bangladesh and Madagascar, and UK Brand Princes Tuna agreed to pilot this training in their supply chain.

Covid-19 had a huge impact on the project, with closed borders and restricted travel halting recruitment of new migrant workers in Bangladesh, Madagascar and elsewhere. Nevertheless, in 2020-21 we supported partners to develop innovative online ways of providing support to migrant workers already in Mauritius, including supporting CTSP to launch a remote advice line and distribute essential emergency items to migrant workers (including soap/hand sanitizer). In June, CTSP was able to reopen its Migrant Resource Centre, alongside continuing to respond to requests for support on its hotline. Covid-19 continued to disrupt planned activities, but we worked closely with partners to ensure that migrant workers have better protection and are less exposed to exploitation through conducting research into pre-departure best practice in Bangladesh, India and Madagascar focussing both on ethical recruitment and decent work practices.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

For people already at risk of exploitation and abuse, the climate crisis presents a horrifying new threat to their freedom. Businesses, governments, and civil society cannot ignore the link between the climate crisis and modern slavery. The increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, together with rising sea levels and desertification, leaves millions of people at risk of losing their homes and livelihoods. And environmental degradation is leading to extreme inequality, as well as driving migration and leaving people at risk of exploitation. Without concerted efforts at the

global level, potentially millions more people look set to fall into modern slavery as a result of the climate crisis.

- During 2020-21 we launched a strategy to highlight the important connection between slavery and climate change, working with partners from Bangladesh, Ghana and Chile to determine how best to make an impact.

We also launched two reports – From a Vicious to a Virtuous Circle – with Dr Christopher O’Connell, seconded under the CAROLINE Fellowship from Dublin City University, which explores the challenges presented to anti-slavery efforts by environmental harms, and Climate-Induced Migration and Modern Slavery: A Toolkit for Decision-Makers, which we delivered with the International Institute for the Environment and Development (IIED). These reports show that climate change and modern slavery form a vicious circle, in which the climate crisis forces many people into unsafe migration and unpaid labour, actively contributing to environmental harm. Compelling case studies from Peru, Bolivia, Ghana and Bangladesh demonstrate how climate change can be the tipping point that makes people vulnerable to modern slavery.

- Our work in this area also informed our advocacy and campaigning around the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021, and will continue onwards in the critical years ahead, as we help make sure that modern slavery is put at the heart of global climate policymaking by businesses, governments and international institutions.

### **Part III. Measurement of Outcomes:**

Our original quantitative targets for the supply chain initiative in Mauritius were heavily impacted by Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent pivoting of support. However, by March 2021 the project had achieved the following progress against the original indicators:

- Migrant workers receiving grievance support and services: 444
- Migrant workers receiving rights awareness training: 637
- Workers receiving pre-departure training: 160
- UK-based brands and their suppliers participating in awareness-raising sessions or meetings: 35
- Government officials participating in meetings or advocacy/campaign events: 59
- Government policy changes in favour of vulnerable migrant workers: 2

Over the period covered by this COE, our broader engagement with businesses has benefitted hundreds of companies in a range of contexts, from one-off or short-term attendance at discussion forums, training events and courses to long-term partnerships that have assisted businesses in the development of robust and meaningful due diligence policies and implementation mechanisms.

Similarly, our advocacy and campaigning activities have involved partnerships and collaborations with hundreds of civil society organisations, with whom we have acted jointly on efforts to inform and influence business practices in the area of human rights and environmental due diligence.

We have also encouraged and supported many thousands of people - in their roles as consumers, voters and activists – to hold businesses, policy-makers and legislators to account for their actions

and decisions in the context of efforts to eliminate slavery, forced labour, child labour and other exploitative and harmful practices.

- In 2020-21, we launched a new **five-year organisational strategy**. We have identified five strategic priorities that we and the wider anti-slavery movement need to address to help international efforts to end slavery:

**1. System change** - We want to see sustainable, long-term change to the root causes and systems which under-pin and drive slavery. Systemic change must involve all actors, including governments, business and civil society, and changes must have effect in law, policy, and practice.

**2. Survivors' voices** - Survivors' voices are crucial to understanding and addressing slavery. Effective and ethical survivor engagement must be the norm, throughout our movement.

**3. Movement building** - To be most effective in a changing world, the global anti-slavery movement would benefit from more effective coordination and more coherent planning. Power needs to be distributed more fairly across the movement with more representation of survivor-led and southern-led organisations in global policymaking.

**4. Framing the issue** - The current and emerging movement has placed slavery on political agendas, but more work is required to create effective ways of presenting issues, so they remain a priority, responses are galvanised, and change is secured.

**5. Legal frameworks** - International human rights instruments are under threat globally and are not being used to their full extent to end slavery. While most countries have ratified instruments to end slavery, only 55% have enacted legislation to put those rights into practice. Where domestic legislation does exist, it is underutilised to prevent slavery and protect victims.

Anti-Slavery International is committed to actions that address these strategic priorities at the global level and in the context of our focus themes:

- **Ending child slavery**
- **Responsible business**
- **Migration and trafficking**
- **Slavery and climate change**

As these themes and strategic priorities are developed into concrete programmes and projects, we will develop appropriate measures against which our progress in these areas can be measured.