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World Health Day

Public Statement by the Commonwealth 8.7 Network

7 April 2023

Ensuring 'Health for All' by Addressing the Mental Health of Survivors of Contemporary Forms of Slavery and Human Trafficking

London, 7 April 2023: On World Health Day, the Commonwealth 8.7 Network calls upon member nations to address the crucial issue of mental health for survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking.

As we strive to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery, forced labour and human trafficking, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the mental health and well-being of survivors receive utmost priority in order to achieve ['health for all,'](#) the theme for 2023.

According to the latest [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery](#), there were an estimated 50 million people living in modern slavery worldwide in 2021, an increase of 10 million over 2016 figures. As a group of nations representing over 2.5 billion people, or a third of the global population, the Commonwealth must take a strong stand against contemporary forms of slavery and work together for a better future.

The impact of slavery and human trafficking on survivors' mental health cannot be overstated. Many survivors who reach out to support services often experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and sometimes even self-harm or attempt suicide .

According to the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC), PTSD occurs more frequently in survivors of human trafficking compared to other victims "due to their exposure to one or more traumatic events over a long period of time."

These psychological scars can be long-lasting and debilitating, hindering survivors' ability to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society.

[Recent research](#) published in the European Journal of Psychiatry revealed that, on average, 41% of modern slavery and human trafficking survivors who participated in the study had Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. [Numerous other studies](#) have emphasised the high vulnerability of human trafficking survivors to mental health issues. However, funding and resources for mental health support remain disproportionately low compared to other forms of assistance for trafficking victims.

The Commonwealth 8.7 Network, named after Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7, is a coalition of over 80 civil society organisations across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and the Pacific, working together to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery.

We call on the leaders of the Commonwealth countries to recognise and address the mental health challenges faced by survivors of contemporary forms of slavery, forced labour and human trafficking. Governments must invest in and expand access to mental health care and support services for survivors, ensuring they receive the appropriate care, treatment, and resources needed for their recovery.

An effective roadmap to achieve this would require strong collaboration between governments, health services, civil society organisations, and survivors themselves to develop and deliver effective mental health interventions. It would also require governments to allocate sufficient resources for mental health care and support services, ensuring they are accessible, culturally appropriate, and tailored to the unique needs of survivors.

As we commemorate World Health Day, we must remember the linkages between physical and mental health while fighting for a world free from slavery and human trafficking. The Commonwealth 8.7 Network remains committed to working together to create a brighter, more equitable future for all, where every individual can live free from exploitation and enjoy the right to mental well-being.

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