



We support the Sustainable Development Goals

World Day for Safety and Health at Work

Public Statement by the Commonwealth 8.7 Network

28 April 2023

Prioritise Workplace Safety and Health for Victims of Forced Labour and Persons with Disabilities

London, 28 April 2023: On the occasion of the [World Day for Safety and Health at Work](#), the Commonwealth 8.7 Network urges leaders of Commonwealth states to prioritise workplace safety and health for vulnerable workers, including persons with disabilities, both physical and intellectual, who are at risk of forced labour and human trafficking.

As we work towards eliminating contemporary forms of slavery, including forced labour and human trafficking, it is essential to focus on the unique challenges vulnerable populations face at their places of work.

[Global estimates](#) from 2021 found that there were over 28 million people in forced labour. Among these, persons with disabilities are particularly at risk of exploitation due to their social and economic marginalisation, discrimination, isolation, inadequate access to support services, and dependence on others.

On this World Day for Safety and Health at Work, the Commonwealth 8.7 Network draws attention to this often marginalised group and their vulnerability to all forms of exploitation including forced begging, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and forced labour.

The links between forced labour and disability manifests in different ways; those born with a disability can be targeted, groomed and coerced into exploitation or disabilities may result from accidents in workplaces that fail to protect health and safety, such failings in themselves sometimes indicative of an abusive working environment.

We urge Commonwealth leaders to address these challenges by prioritising inclusive policies and accessible support services for all, including persons with disabilities.

Collaborative efforts across Commonwealth countries, representing over 2.5 billion people, are vital for devising comprehensive strategies that protect worker safety and health, allocate resources for prevention and rehabilitation, and foster a culture that values workplace safety.

On this World Day for Safety and Health at Work, we call upon member states to take concrete steps to ensure workplaces are safe and healthy to guard against abusive working environments that exploit the most vulnerable. Leaders must commit to:

1. Develop and implement robust labour regulations that protect the rights of all workers, particularly those most vulnerable to exploitation, such as persons with disabilities.
2. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms and invest in capacity building for labour inspectors and law enforcement agencies to identify and address labour exploitation and unsafe working conditions.
3. Foster collaboration between governments, civil society organisations, and the private sector to create inclusive policies and accessible support services for workers in need, particularly those with disabilities.
4. Allocate sufficient resources to raise awareness about workplace safety and health, as well as workers' rights, among both employers and employees.
5. Encourage the exchange of good practices and knowledge among Commonwealth countries to address the unique challenges faced by victims of forced labour and persons with disabilities in the workforce.

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 believe that a collective effort by Commonwealth states can lead to significant improvements in workplace safety and health for victims of forced labour and persons with disabilities all over the world.

As we commemorate the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, let us reaffirm our commitment to creating a world where every individual enjoys the right to decent work in a safe and healthy environment. The Commonwealth 8.7 Network will continue to work together to build a brighter, more equitable future for all, free from exploitation and injustice.

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