



International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
Statement by the Commonwealth 8.7 Network

London, 2 December 2023. On the occasion of this International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, the [Commonwealth 8.7 Network](#) reiterates its unwavering commitment to promoting awareness, fostering collaboration, and advocating for robust measures to tackle forced labour, human trafficking, child early and forced marriage, along with other forms of contemporary slavery, and ensure the protection of human rights for all.

According to the latest [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery](#), there were an estimated 50 million people living in contemporary forms of slavery worldwide in 2021, an increase of 10 million people since 2016. 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.

Slavery, in its various historical manifestations, has inflicted profound and enduring harm on individuals and communities worldwide. The legacy of centuries of exploitation, dehumanisation, and systemic injustice continues to shape societies today despite the abolition of slavery more than 200 years ago. It is imperative that we acknowledge this dark chapter of human history and commit ourselves to addressing modern day slavery.

Despite significant progress in the fight against contemporary forms of slavery through the intervention of international targets, protocols, guiding principles and policies, and emerging due diligence in supply chain legislation, exploitation persists. Human trafficking, forced labour, child early and forced marriage, debt bondage, and other egregious violations of human dignity continue to exist in the Commonwealth. On this International Day for the Abolition of Slavery we demand that States confront these challenges head-on, recognising the urgency of addressing both the root causes and the immediate consequences of these atrocities.

The Commonwealth 8.7 Network, named after Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7, is a coalition of 100 civil society organisations across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and the Pacific, working together to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery.

On this International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, we call on Commonwealth Governments to take immediate action to address contemporary forms of slavery through:

- **Legislation and Enforcement:** Governments must enact laws and policies that criminalise all forms of contemporary slavery and ensure that legislation is properly enforced, including by allocating adequate resources and training for all actors within the

justice system and removing barriers to victim participation in the criminal justice process.

- **Improved Coordination and Accountability:** Governments should seek to establish a national coordinating body which is adequately resourced and operational, with an independent entity to monitor progress and ensure public accountability.
- **Education and Awareness Raising:** Education plays a crucial role in preventing contemporary forms of slavery. By raising awareness about the various forms of exploitation and the indicators of slavery, we empower individuals and communities to identify, prevent, and report instances of abuse.
- **Support for Survivors:** Comprehensive support systems must be established to assist survivors of contemporary forms of slavery, providing them with access to rehabilitation, legal aid, and other necessary services. At risk-communities should also receive assistance and support to mitigate the risks of further human rights abuses.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Commonwealth Governments should collaborate with businesses and civil society organisations to strengthen efforts to tackle contemporary forms of slavery. They must also ensure survivors, as critical stakeholders with lived experience, are afforded meaningful participation in all aspects of designing, implementing and monitoring government efforts towards achieving SDG Target 8.7.
- **Corporate Responsibility:** Companies must actively engage in responsible business practices, including identifying, mitigating, preventing, and accounting for issues of forced labour and exploitation in their supply chains. Governments and consumers alike should hold corporations accountable for any involvement in exploitative practices, with Governments providing leadership in enabling reporter and auditors access to factories, farms and fisheries.
- **International Cooperation:** A coordinated, global effort is crucial to effectively combat contemporary forms of slavery. Governments must collaborate on intelligence-sharing, capacity-building, and the development of unified strategies to address the complex challenges associated with contemporary forms of slavery.

The Commonwealth 8.7 Network reiterates its commitment to a world where every individual can live free from the complexities of exploitation. By fostering international cooperation, implementing and enforcing stringent laws, raising awareness, and empowering survivors, we can collectively strive to eradicate contemporary slavery in all of its forms and build a more just and equitable future for all.

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