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DEVELOPED NATIONS FAR MORE EXPOSED TO SLAVERY WITHIN THEIR BORDERS THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

19 July 2018 – The number of people falling victim to modern slavery in developed countries is far higher than previously thought, shifting pressure on those countries to step up their efforts to combat the problem, a landmark report shows.

The 2018 Global Slavery Index shows 403,000 people are living in modern slavery in the US, or 1 in 800 Americans, seven-times higher than previous estimates. The prevalence of modern slavery in the UK is almost 12-times higher than previous figures.

The data highlights the truly global nature of forced labour, forced marriage and forced sexual exploitation, and the role many rich countries play in exploiting the most vulnerable.

The improved measures of modern slavery draw from the largest survey of its kind ever conducted, covering nearly twice the number of countries surveyed previously. Face to face interviews with over 70,000 respondents revealed that while surveys were conducted in 48 countries, men, women, and children were exploited in 79 countries, including high rates of exploitation in many developed countries.

“The responsibility that developed countries have for modern slavery, revealed by this new data, is a huge wakeup call,” said Andrew Forrest, the Australian philanthropist and businessman who founded the GSI.

“The pressure to respond to this appalling human crime must shift from poorer countries to richer nations that have the resources and institutions to do much better. It is flourishing right under our noses.

“It’s widely accepted that most crimes go unreported and unrecorded, because the victims are marginalised and vulnerable, and the black economy thrives where accountability is absent. This report demonstrates, straight from the mouths of some of the 40.3 million victims of modern slavery, that these deplorable crimes continue happening out of sight, and at a tragic scale.

“We cannot sit back while millions of women, girls, men and boys around the world are having their lives destroyed and their potential extinguished by criminals seeking a quick profit.”

The 2018 GSI also reveals developed countries are heavily exposed to the risk of slavery within their supply chains. G20 countries annually import over \$US354bn ‘at risk’ products, produced from sectors in countries where people are subjected to forced labour.

The US is by far the largest importer of at risk products (\$US144bn). The US figure is three times that of the second largest G20 importer Japan (\$US47bn), while Germany (\$US30bn), the UK (\$US18bn) and France (\$US16bn) complete the top five.

The research found laptops, computers and mobile phones proved to be the largest category of at risk imports by dollar value (\$US200.1bn), followed by garments (\$US127.7bn), fish (\$US12.9bn), cocoa (US\$3.6bn) and sugar cane (\$US2.1bn).

“What is most striking about the findings is that this is a truly global but poorly regulated issue – with a range of factors driving exploitation in different countries,” said Fiona David, executive director of research at the Walk Free Foundation, the charity responsible for the GSI report.

“The prevalence of modern slavery is driven through conflict and oppression, but it’s also derived in more developed countries from consumer demand for the latest goods at the best possible price. We need different strategies in different regions to address the many drivers of modern slavery. The common element is that every country must act.”

Twelve G20 countries are yet to formally enact laws or policies to stop businesses sourcing goods from forced labour, despite the G20 last year committing to improve human rights due diligence in corporate operations and supply chains. Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Italy, UK and US have all introduced or are taking steps to introduce laws that would tackle modern slavery.

“The level of action G20 countries have taken to date to put an end to human trafficking and modern slavery has been limited,” said UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland.

“These nations have a responsibility to pioneer an end to the demand for imported goods produced by criminals who engage forced or exploited workers and perpetuate the multi-billion-dollar business of modern slavery.

“We must hold our governments to higher levels of scrutiny and insist our business leaders make bold moves. We must question why more is not being done to free the millions of people around the world that are trapped, abused and beaten down while being bought and sold to provide goods for businesses across the world. This can no longer be tolerated as a necessary or inevitable ‘business model’ and the G20 nations are uniquely placed to provide the leadership to eradicate this globalised crime,” Mr Hyland said.

North Korea has the highest prevalence of modern slavery in the world, with one in ten people (2.6 million) forced to work, the 2018 GSI found. Countries suffering from conflict and oppressive regimes are at most risk of fostering modern slavery, with Eritrea, Burundi, the Central African Republic and Afghanistan following North Korea as the countries with highest prevalence.

Seventy-one per cent of people trapped in modern slavery today are women, with a large proportion accounting for the 15.4 million people who are living in a forced marriage. At the heart of this gender divide issue is the cycle of inequality for women across global culture, relating to cultural practices, family structures, lack of autonomy, lack of access to education, and gaps in legal protection.

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The Global Slavery Index report can be found at www.globalsslaveryindex.org

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