

Media Release –17 April, 2018

Walk Free to Commonwealth nations: Time to get serious about slavery

The Walk Free Foundation, chaired by Australian philanthropic leader Andrew Forrest AO, will today call on all Commonwealth nations to enforce 10 measures that will end modern slavery by 2030.

Launching the Foundation's *Towards a Common Future* report, Mr Forrest said the ten-point plan was a clarion call and a moral imperative for the Commonwealth.

"We falsely believe that human slavery happens beyond our borders and that ending it is beyond our control," Mr Forrest said.

"The truth is that ordinary people everywhere in the world, including the UK, unwittingly come into contact with victims of modern slavery every day - we might walk past a little girl trapped in a forced marriage, a hotel cleaner that has had her passport confiscated, or touch this crime through the clothes and products made through illegal forced labour that we use every day."

"Given the strength and moral standing of the Commonwealth, we cannot stand idly by while over 40 million people remain victims of modern slavery around the world. This report highlights the important steps Commonwealth countries are taking to fight this heinous crime, but we can and must do more if we are to meet the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

The launch of the report at Australia House in London highlights the UK's strong leadership on this issue. In 2014, it became the first country to develop a modern slavery strategy and then in 2015 to legislate on corporate action with the 2015 UK Modern Slavery Act. The UK's role as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office for the next two years will be crucial.

Despite the progress that has been made, there are significant challenges and gaps in Commonwealth government responses which need to be addressed in order to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 – ending forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour by 2030.

While most Commonwealth countries have legislation covering all forms of exploitation under SDG 8.7, stronger steps need to be taken on implementation, collaboration and research.

"The responsibility to address this rests with every government," Mr Forrest said. "This is not a developing-world issue. Every society is susceptible to the key drivers that allow modern slavery to flourish.

"Business has a very key role to play in leading and collaborating with government to eliminate slavery in industry head on. This Commonwealth Summit must galvanise support and welcome business into the conversation, igniting a will for change within each individual and challenging those who remain wilfully ignorant."

The report uses new Walk Free data to examine the extent to which the Commonwealth is strengthening legislation, putting victims first, improving regional coordination, addressing risk factors and removing slavery from the economy. ENDS.

The report can be accessed at: <https://www.walkfreefoundation.org/news/resource/achieving-sdg-8-7-in-the-commonwealth/>

Walk Free Ten Point Action Plan For Commonwealth Nations:

1. Criminalise all forms of exploitation and set appropriate penalties
2. Raise the minimum legal age for marriage to 18
3. Strengthen laws to protect labour rights
4. Train and resource law enforcement
5. Train support workers to identify and assist victims
6. Consult with victims on the national response
7. Develop national action plans based on evidence
8. Research trends and prevalence, and share the findings
9. Empower women and girls
10. Engage with business

A more detailed version of the ten-point plan, is available on page nine of the report.

FAST FINDINGS:

- 42 of the 53 Commonwealth nations have ratified or acceded to the UN Trafficking Protocol. Walk Free calls on the remaining 11 to do so as a priority.
- Within domestic frameworks, 81 percent of Commonwealth nations (n=43) have effectively criminalised against human trafficking.
- Only 13 countries in the Commonwealth have criminalised forced marriage.
- While only 8 per cent of Commonwealth nations have funded or otherwise facilitated research into the prevalence of modern slavery within their borders, 75 percent have implemented an awareness campaign since 2012 which targeted a specific vulnerable group or aimed to increase understanding among the general public on how to identify and report suspected cases of exploitation.
- Three countries have mandatory reporting requirements for business.
- 24 countries (45 percent) ensure that labour laws cover all workers, including migrant workers and those working in the informal sector, such as domestic workers, fishers and construction workers.