

23rd ALLIANCE CONFERENCE AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

It's about people: national leadership to end human trafficking

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TUESDAY 18 APRIL 2023

Brief introduction

- I'm going to take a different tack. Fascinating listening to Gary and Leila shows how trafficking encompasses hugely different forms of exploitation. We've heard a lot about sex trafficking in particular, and there is commonly a huge focus on that from policymakers to popular culture. So much so that it's often easy to forget that the bulk of exploitation takes the form of forced labour other than commercial than forced commercial sexual exploitation.
- That was brought home to me the first time I first directly encountered trafficking about 15 years ago when I traveled to Northern Uganda. The Lord's Resistance Army - conflict-driven exploitation, child soldiers, porters, girls, and sex slaves. Always given me a perspective that trafficking encompasses a wide range of different forms of exploitation of vulnerable populations, from labour to sexual exploitation of children...
- That experience was formative for me, and I started working in the anti-trafficking space a few years later.
- The organization I lead, the Freedom Fund, was founded 9 years ago. At that stage, I was the sole staff member, but the organization had big ambitions. 9 years later, we are 80 staff working in 12 countries, supporting over 140 grassroots organizations around the world.
- Headline impact numbers - Over 30,000 were liberated from slavery, 1.5m were directly impacted, and six million were at risk of slavery touched by our work.
- Our goals from the beginning were to help address and focus attention on some of the big gaps in the anti-trafficking response.
- So, with a decade's worth of experience, what have we learned?
- I think our understanding of trafficking and the response has changed in three very significant ways over the last decade.
 1. Our understanding of the **scale** of the problem has changed.
 2. Our understanding of the **nature** of trafficking has changed.
 3. And, most importantly, our understanding of the **most effective leadership and responses** and interventions has changed.

1. Understanding of scale has changed - both globally and locally.

Over the last decade, there has been a huge investment in measurement. There before 2013, there were very rough estimates of the scale of the problem, and there were few, if any, independent, robust estimates of prevalence at a country level.

Fast forward, and we now have increasingly robust global estimates of the scale of exploitation, UNODC on trafficking, ILO and Walk Free, and IOM on modern slavery, broken down into forced labour and forced marriage.

We also have a huge investment in prevalence research. You will have to bear with me as I'm going to use a few numbers, which I know can be a bit dry. But Gary has given a passionate exposition on the realities of slavery, so let me be more technical.

And let's be clear - our shared responsibility is to reduce the number of those in slavery, and that's measured by numbers. And our progress is assessed by measurement. We owe it to those we serve to better understand scale and prevalence, and progress by the numbers.

First, the global numbers.

- Overall estimate of modern slavery increased in the last decade, from 30m in 2013 (GSI) to 50m in 2021 (ILO/WF/IOM estimate).
 - **2013: est. 30m people** in modern slavery. (Older estimates did not include a breakdown by type.)
 - **2021: 50m people in MS**, including **28m in forced labour**, of which **6.3m** of those are in forced commercial sexual exploitation (12.6%)

[Forced labour - 63% in private sectors, 23% in forced commercial sex, and 14% in state-sponsored). Remainder 22m in forced marriage.

Note: This does not necessarily mean an increase in actual MS. Better research methodology & greater investment mean figures that are more accurate.]

Global numbers help inform us of the **profitability** of the trade in humans. The best estimate was \$150bn in profits - from 2014. This was based on an old estimate of 21 m in forced labour. Given that estimates of forced labour have increased by 1/3, then safe to say that profits from slavery are like to exceed 200bn.

- There has been a huge investment in prevalence studies at national and sub-national levels conducted by independent researchers, not NGOs themselves.
- This may seem a little technical - but if we don't know how many people in trafficking in a country or region we are working in, now do we know if our efforts have made any difference?
- To my mind, slavery space about 12 years ago was a bit of an evidence-free zone. That has changed hugely in the last decade. We have gone from zero independent research studies to 130.

- *[In 2013 - no rigorous, independent state or sub-state prevalence surveys - now we have published 8 (3+ in progress), IJM 7, GFEMS 10+. USG funding at least 12 at present, and Walk Free commissioned Gallup surveys of nearly 50 countries.*
- *A huge investment, and critically important as it helps inform changing nature of the problem and whether we, collectively, are having any impact.*
- *New collaborations: a partnership between ILO, IOM & Walk Free on global estimates. First global data hub on human trafficking.*
- *Methodology has increased in rigor and sophistication, drawing lessons from public health & benefiting from more funding. New innovations, like social media data, machine learning, and satellite imagery.]*

2. Understanding of the nature of trafficking has changed, painting a more complex picture.

- Two decades ago, when Palermo Protocol was being negotiated, the overwhelming focus was on sex trafficking - particularly in the US, but also in Europe and other OSCE countries (OSCE includes Europe, U.S. & Canada).
- This anti-trafficking sector has historically had a strong focus on the sex industry overall, not just trafficking as defined in Palermo Protocol.
- **It should be obvious but important to note the international legal definition of human trafficking involves force, threat, or coercion. A distinction must be made between the commercial sex industry writ large and the trafficking of people for forced sex.**
- Sex trafficking is certainly an important issue to address. But the overwhelming focus on sex trafficking/sex industry has also often meant ignoring forced labour outside the sex industry, which we know makes up a majority of cases (63% vs. 23% of forced labour, according to Global Estimates). If you take modern slavery lenses - 6.3m million in sex trafficking out of 50 million
- Framing matters - it influences policy, funding, public awareness, identification of cases, and victims' willingness to report. It determines law enforcement and prosecutors' understanding & priorities.
 - Examples: Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking 2017 report found USG spent more than 80% of its anti-trafficking budget on sex trafficking- pushing NGOs to focus on it.
 - Labour trafficking least prosecuted and least reported form - only 28% of prosecutions.
- It has been gratifying to see that as an understanding of the nature of trafficking has evolved, the nature of the response has also (albeit slowly) evolved. Some of the most exciting developments in anti-trafficking space are happening in forced labour/ supply chains - particularly in the OSCE region - EU in particular.
 - *Examples: US Tariff Act Section 507 - in the last 3 years, CBP has issued 30 Withhold Release Orders against importing companies, including for entire*

product categories from geography rather than just from one supplier (such as all cotton products from Turkmenistan). Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

- *EU MHRDD: Dec 2022, member states agreed on a common position regarding MHRDD and possible EU import ban. However, it remains to be negotiated & voted on, with many critiques from CSOs. Other countries progressing with import bans.*
- *Growing support for Global South orgs to do investigations, like we are funding, and major strategic litigation cases like Nestle, Tesco, and Nevsun.*
- Also, a greater focus on more neglected forms of MS: bonded & forced labour/ labour trafficking, forced marriage, and CDW.
- Better data/understanding about linkages with vulnerabilities and root causes.

[Awareness has grown, and media played a key role - coverage of MS increased by over 300% from 2000-2016 (Anti-Trafficking Journal).

- *37% increase in survivor testimonies from 2012-2018 (ILO 2019).*
- *CNN Freedom Project has done 600 stories since 2010.*
- *Examples: NY Times, AP, and Guardian coverage of forced labour in the seafood industry, which played a role in changing corporate behaviour & government policy.]*

3. Understanding of most effective leadership and response has changed in important ways

- **There has been a big and important shift from an overwhelming focus on the prosecution to prevention, systems change, and survivor-centered approaches.**
- Big focus in the past on law enforcement, raid & rescue. Often very limited focus on prevention beyond deterrence or on aftercare.
- Now understanding that broader ranges of tactics are necessary and realization of the more complex & sometimes harmful role of law enforcement.
- Understanding that many more actors are involved - roles for governments, international orgs, tech, corporates, unions, and academia.
- In particular, we understand we need to change whole systems, build resilient communities, and center those workers and communities we serve in our work.
- Civil society has always been at the forefront of the fight against trafficking,
- Need more leadership from international institutions - i.e., OSCE, the G7, and the EU - where countries have the power to support & pressure one another.
- As an activist, I am deeply disappointed that we do not have any national leaders as champions of the anti-trafficking cause since Theresa May stepped down in the UK. We particularly need champions from the majority world - and the OSCE can clearly play a leadership role. And by champion - I mean a leader who will push hard on this issue in international fora and make their country a showcase for progressive efforts to tackle trafficking.
- Perhaps most importantly, we are seeing a shift toward centering survivor leadership - in the past, survivors were tokenized & used for their stories, but now moving to

understand they have to be central to all efforts. We are not there yet. Our sector is way behind other development and rights sectors in centering lived experience. Very pleased to see next panel will have a strong focus on survivor leadership, but I look forward to the day when important events like this have survivors speaking in the opening remarks and session!

- *Understanding of systems change and shift towards different ways of measuring. At FF, we now measure systems change & are moving toward 10-year time horizons for prevalence reduction.*
- *Approach to FL in supply chains has also shifted. Before: focus on voluntary initiatives and consumer awareness. Now: Focus on consistent legislation with civil penalties & redress for workers (MHRDD & import bans), worker-driven models, and strategic litigation. Understanding that local workers/CSOs must be centered.*
- *Focus on building community-level resilience & locally led initiatives (for example- the FF model specifically designed to support frontline orgs to be more effective & sustainable).*

So, in a decade, we've seen huge progress in multiple ways, much of it deeply encouraging. **But we're left with the very cold and stark fact that since we started measuring slavery globally a decade ago, our estimates have increased by $\frac{2}{3}$ - either through better measurement or an increase in trafficking - and most likely both.**

Therefore, we are not succeeding by any credible measure. I am hopeful that we can change those trends, particularly given our deeper knowledge and expertise and real progress in tackling forced labour in particular. However, we will not without much more effective efforts from everyone here.