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CHRI
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

PRESS STATEMENT

Commonwealth countries must act urgently to meet modern slavery targets

New Delhi/London/Perth July 30, 2020 – Commonwealth countries have made little progress towards their commitment to eradicate modern slavery by 2030, despite an estimated 1 in every 150 people in the Commonwealth living in conditions of modern slavery.

Global anti-slavery organisation Walk Free and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) have today released – *Eradicating Modern Slavery: An assessment of Commonwealth government progress on achieving SDG Target 8.7*. The report highlights the need for renewed urgency from Commonwealth member states, to deliver on their promises made in 2018, to eradicate modern slavery and achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.7 by 2030.

The report finds only one third of Commonwealth member states criminalise forced marriage, and 23 fail to criminalise commercial child sexual exploitation. Out of 54 countries, only four engage with business to investigate supply chains, and all countries report gaps in victim assistance programs.

Walk Free and CHRI are calling for modern slavery to be set firmly on the agenda for the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The report recommends Commonwealth governments launch a major initiative, which builds on existing anti-slavery frameworks, to combat modern slavery and exploitation.

Walk Free co-founder Grace Forrest said member states need to act now to protect vulnerable people in the Commonwealth.

“People living in modern slavery don’t need more unfulfilled promises or unimplemented plans. Instead we are urging Commonwealth states to act,” Ms Forrest said.

“One in every 150 people in the Commonwealth is living in modern slavery. This represents approximately 15.7 million men, women, and children who are subject to forced labour, forced marriage, or victims of human trafficking.

“While our prevalence estimates in 2018 were staggering, the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased vulnerability to modern slavery around the world.

“This report comes at a critical juncture – a time when the world is awakening to ongoing injustices, questioning historical inequalities, and confronting unprecedented crises.”

CHRI’s International Director Sanjoy Hazarika said an estimated 40 per cent of the 40.3 million people in modern slavery live in the Commonwealth.

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“This joint research and report highlights a basic point – time is running out to deliver on the promises made by member states in 2018, at the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London,” Mr Hazarika said.

Due to COVID-19, the next CHOGM has been delayed at least 12 months.

Sneh Aurora, Director of the CHRI London office said CHRI and Walk Free intended to use the new report to work with Commonwealth governments, ahead of the next meeting.

“Member states and the Commonwealth Secretariat must come together and use CHOGM in 2021 as an opportunity to tackle modern slavery, formalise global and regional coordination, strengthen legislation, and develop monitoring frameworks to assess implementation,” Ms Aurora said.

Under SDG Target 8.7 governments have committed to: “Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”

Walk Free and CHRI’s report outlines clear recommendations for each geographical region in the Commonwealth and calls for urgent, coordinated action by all member states before the next CHOGM and beyond.

The report is available to download from the [Walk Free](#) and [CHRI](#) websites.

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About Walk Free:

Walk Free, powered by Minderoo Foundation, is an international human rights organisation working to end modern slavery globally within our generation. Walk Free is the producer of the Global Slavery Index – the world’s leading dataset on measuring and understanding slavery and works on systems change through government, business and faith – to ensure slavery is tackled through both a legal and cultural framework.

About Minderoo Foundation:

Established by Andrew and Nicola Forrest in 2001, Minderoo Foundation is a modern philanthropic organisation seeking to break down barriers, innovate and drive positive, lasting change. Minderoo Foundation is proudly Australian, with key initiatives spanning from ocean research and ending slavery, to collaboration in cancer and community projects.

About Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative:

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-governmental organisation headquartered in New Delhi, with offices in London, UK, and Accra, Ghana. Since 1987, it has worked for the practical realization of human rights through research, strategic advocacy, capacity building, engagement and mobilization within the Commonwealth. CHRI specializes in the areas of access to justice, with a focus on police and prison reforms, and access to information. It also supports the achievement of SDG Target 8.7 and the eradication of contemporary forms of slavery. CHRI founded and is Secretariat to the Commonwealth 8.7 Network, an international member-driven network of over 60 national and local civil society organisation members with a common vision to end contemporary forms of slavery and human trafficking. In 2019, the 8.7 Network received the Commonwealth Secretary-General's Innovation for Sustainable Development Award.