

**45th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of
slavery, including its causes and consequences**

**Oral statement delivered by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
Tuesday, 15 September 2020**

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, I welcome the Special Rapporteur's report highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on contemporary forms of slavery. In particular we support the report's focus on the most vulnerable groups - including informal and migrant workers - who lack adequate protections and face an increased risk of exploitation due to the economic impact of the pandemic.

Our recent report *Eradicating Modern Slavery*,¹ uncovered significant gaps in government responses to contemporary forms of slavery. We found that only 24 Commonwealth countries have labour laws that extend to everyone. We urge States to ensure that labour protections extend also to vulnerable groups, both in legislation and implementation, through the strengthening and enforcement of national laws, and by regulating recruitment processes.

Our data also shows there is widespread government inaction within the Commonwealth in holding businesses to account. Only 7% of Commonwealth countries have modern slavery checks in public procurement, and none require businesses to undertake mandatory due diligence to assess modern slavery risks. We also call on States to strengthen laws and policies applicable to supply chains, including by implementing mandatory transparency requirements and mandatory human rights due diligence.

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in the context of contemporary forms of slavery, and unless immediate action is taken, it threatens to erase the progress made towards achieving SDG Target 8.7.

Thank you.

1 Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and Minderoo Walk Free (2020), *Eradicating Modern Slavery: An assessment of Commonwealth governments' progress on achieving SDG Target 8.7*. Available at: <https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publication/eradicating-modern-slavery-an-assessment-of-commonwealth-government-progress-on-achieving-sdg-target-87>.