

Why we need to fight Modern Slavery

What is Modern Slavery?



Modern slavery is an umbrella term for all forms of slavery, trafficking and related exploitation

It refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, abuse of power and deception. Survivors of modern slavery tell stories of being sold a false promise for a better life. They are often vulnerable, coming from areas where there is little possibility of work or fleeing from conflict regions. They are offered a job, a chance to make money and to build a new life for themselves. The job they are offered turns out to be a lie and instead they are forced to work in difficult and degrading conditions, with little or no pay. The threat of violence, to themselves or their families, hangs over them and traps them in their situation. Even if their trafficker does not physically control them, a mistrust of authority, shame and embarrassment may stop them seeking help.

This is the reality for 15,000 men, women and children in Australia and 3,000 men, women and children in New Zealand (Global Slavery Index, 2018)

High risk industries within the Pacific region include fisheries, construction, agriculture, hospitality and domestic services.

The Pacific is a source region for migrant workers

Many citizens of Pacific Island states look to improve their circumstances by migrating to seek work in larger regional economies, such as jobs in industries like agriculture, fisheries, tourism and hospitality.

Migrant workers are highly vulnerable to being exploited by unscrupulous subcontractors and agents, who sometimes take advantage and exploit their lack of knowledge and vulnerability. Some Pacific migrant workers have fallen victim to recruitment scams, debt bondage and false promises for well paid jobs and visa sponsorship, only to discover later they have misled and subjected to serious mistreatment.

There have been over 20 fatalities on overseas labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand alone in recent years including workers from Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa, Fiji and Kiribati. Some died in traffic accidents, while a number died suddenly with a cause of deaths undetermined.

Responding to the Human Cost

Church members of Pacific Island backgrounds in host countries are often at the frontline of the pastoral response to these vulnerable people, from supporting workers in difficulty to liaising with families grieving deceased workers. There is widespread ecumenical support in Australia to improve the welfare, conditions and pastoral care available for people vulnerable to modern slavery, and for training to recognise the signs of modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking.

WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

SEE IT, SPEAK OUT

So what can we do? How can we make a difference? Faith communities are often seen as places of safety and refuge to vulnerable people in crisis. Often we are first responders. Where people are vulnerable and are seeking our help we must be prepared to act, to bring our passion for God's mission to help those in need. In his Lenten message of 2015, Pope Francis prayed that churches would "become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference". What would it mean for your church to be an 'island of mercy'? Is your church looking outward to engage with vulnerable people who could be victims of this injustice?



LEARNING TO SPOT THE SIGNS OF MODERN SLAVERY:

Appearance

- Show signs of physical or psychological abuse and untreated injuries
- Look malnourished or unkempt, or appear withdrawn and neglected
- Seem under the control or influence of others
- Wear the same clothes every day or no safety equipment even if their work requires it
- Lack of personal belongings or official ID documents

Work

- Withholding of identity documents
- Lack of earnings, or withholding of wages or underpayment
- Working to pay off significant debts
- Abusive/ substandard working and living conditions
- Excessive overtime or no time off

Accommodation

- Living in dirty, cramped or overcrowded accommodation
- Living and working at the same address
- Appear unfamiliar with their neighbourhood or where they work

Travel

- Rarely allowed to travel on their own
- Collected and dropped off at irregular hours in a crowded transport with other workers
- Have no control of their identification documents such as their passport
- Reluctant to seek help and avoid eye contact

Seeking Help

- Frightened or hesitant to talk to strangers
- Fear of police, don't know who to trust or where to get help
- Afraid of deportation, and of the risk of violence to themselves or their family

REPORT IT –

If you suspect someone is a victim of modern slavery, contact the local police immediately or:

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Office for the Pacific, Suva Fiji Islands:

- Phone: (679) 331 0465
- Email: Pacific.ohchr@un.org

The difference between a bad job and modern slavery is the freedom to leave... Look for the signs!



Questions to Ask

- Can you leave your job or situation if you want? If not, why not?
- What do you think would happen if you tried to leave or told anyone?
- Can you come and go from work as you please?
- Have you been threatened if you try to leave?
- Have you been physically harmed in any way?
- Are you paid wages? Are you forced to work off debt?
- Where do you sleep and eat? Do you sleep in a bed, on a cot or on the floor?
- Have you ever been deprived of food, water, sleep or medical care?
- Do you have to ask permission to eat, sleep or go to the bathroom?
- Are there locks on your doors and windows so you cannot get out?
- Has anyone threatened your family?
- Has your identification or documentation been taken from you?
- Is anyone forcing you to do anything that you do not want to do?

Cases of slavery-like practices in the Pacific region:

1. In 2016, New Zealand secured its first people trafficking conviction. A labour contractor was found guilty of 15 human trafficking charges involving Fijians. The contractor was sentenced to nine years in prison, and ordered to pay a total of \$NZ28,167 to his victims. The trafficker advertised in newspapers in Fiji promising high wages to pick kiwi fruit in exchange for recruitment fees and charges. The workers did not receive work visas, and men and women were forced to share a damp basement room. (Case study sourced from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_630482.pdf)
2. The PNG Government has assisted in the identification of 21 victims of human trafficking. Among the identified victims, six Papua New Guinean women and two Papua New Guinean girls were subjected to sex trafficking, while two men from Papua New Guinea were subjected to forced labour in a motel and 20 men and one boy from Burma, Cambodia, and Vietnam were subjected to forced labour on fishing vessels. (Case study sourced from: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/258881.pdf>)
3. An investigation by the ABC News revealed 20 seasonal farm workers from Fiji and Tonga in Shepparton, Victoria received as little as \$9 a week after deductions. One worker said "I feel sad because there's no money to send to my family in Tonga." These seasonal workers had to share three to a caravan, and women made to share the same bed were still made to pay \$A120 per person per week for accommodation by labour hire contractors. There were also deductions for health insurance, daily transport to the farm and back, bedding and food. (Case study reported by the ABC: [http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/seasonal-farm-workers-receiving-as-little-as-\\$9-a/7201286](http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/seasonal-farm-workers-receiving-as-little-as-$9-a/7201286))
4. Twenty workers from Vanuatu were sponsored by a labour contractor to work picking tomatoes in Queensland. Some days the workers only ate tomatoes or bread but many days had nothing at all. The workers should have earned between \$15,000 - \$A20,000 for six months work but received only \$150. The workers had to sleep on chairs or in a mini-bus. In sentencing in 2017, Judge Michael Jarratt said it was "the serious exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers lured to Australia by false promises", "most received no wages and had to endure appalling treatment." (Case study reported by the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/aug/03/hungry-poor-exploited-alarm-over-australias-import-of-farm-workers>)

This is not a new issue. Labour migration has a chequered history in the Pacific region. Practices such as blackbirding and indentured labour in the 19th and early 20th century saw many Pacific Islanders tricked or coerced into working in neighbouring colonies. Of those 'blackbirded' to work on sugar plantations in Queensland, around 30 per cent died due to exposure to European diseases, malnutrition and mistreatment. This painful history is a sharp reminder of our responsibility to care for vulnerable Pacific workers today.





Over 40 million people around the world are trapped in modern slavery (Global Estimates of Modern Slavery), more than at any time in history and despite slavery being illegal in almost every country. Those enslaved have had their rights and freedom stolen from them in horrendous circumstances. They are often subjected to abuse, both physical and mental. They are treated as commodities to be bought, sold and traded.

Slaves can be found in every country in the world – in factories, in fields and brothels, on fishing boats, within private residences and a multitude of other places where greed and corruption have overridden human values.

People trapped in slavery live brutal existences in cities and villages, slums and rural areas. From Thai fisherman trawling fish, to the Congolese boy mining diamonds, from the Uzbek child picking cotton to the Indian girl stitching footballs – modern slavery is a profitable business generating more than US\$150 billion a year (International Labor Organization).

Acknowledging the problem and advocating against it is our responsibility.

Change is long overdue, and that change has begun.



About the Global Freedom Network

The Global Freedom Network is committed to the eradication of modern slavery through engagement with faith leaders around the world and working with them to take spiritual and practical actions to eradicate modern slavery. We empower them to mobilise their efforts and work in collaboration with the private, public and civil sectors to fight modern slavery. We also work with the governments of the ten leading economies of the world to support them to enact laws, and ensure budget and capability for enforcement, to hold organisations accountable for modern slavery in their supply chains.

Our Impact

The Global Freedom Network is continuing to build on the momentum achieved through the Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery in events in Vatican City, Delhi, Canberra, Jakarta, Buenos Aires and Medellin between 2014 and 2018. We believe that the actions and testimony of the faith leaders will inspire other leaders and their communities around the world to also unite in this vision of ending modern slavery, for all times. Engagement is ongoing with other world faiths that share the aspiration for a world without modern slavery. Faith Leader forums are planned in other countries in 2018/2019.

Find out more

Walk Free Foundation – walkfreefoundation.org

Global Freedom Network – globalfreedomnetwork.org

Global Slavery Index – globalslaveryindex.org



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