

International Development Sub-Committee on the Work of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact

Oral evidence: ICAI's review of the UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme, HC 104

Wednesday 30 June 2021

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Members present: Theo Clarke (Chair); Chris Law; Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 36 - 64

Witnesses

I: Dame Sara Thornton, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner; Christian Guy, Chief Executive Officer, Justice and Care.

II: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Jennifer Townson, UK Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sara Thornton and Christian Guy.

Q36 **Chair:** Welcome to our first panel of witnesses for this evidence session on the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's review of the UK approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme. Could I ask our first panel of witnesses to introduce themselves briefly?

Christian Guy: Good morning. Thank you for having me along. I am Christian Guy. I am the chief executive of an international NGO fighting human trafficking, working with Governments and police to bring people out of exploitation, helping them to dismantle the business model and get policy right. Before that I worked for Prime Minister David Cameron in Downing Street as an adviser, and led the Centre for Social Justice, which was involved in the formation of the Modern Slavery Act. It is very good to be here. Thank you for having me.

Dame Sara Thornton: Good morning. I am Sara Thornton, the UK independent anti-slavery commissioner.

Q37 **Chair:** Dame Sara, what is the impact domestically of not addressing modern slavery at an international level?

Dame Sara Thornton: We are all aware that if we work with countries of origin for victims of modern slavery that come to the UK, we can build resilience and prevent people being trafficked in the first place. We know that most potential victims that are identified in the UK are, in fact, foreign nationals. Work over the last few years has shown that it is quite a small number of countries that are consistently represented in the majority of those cases. A survey showed that between 2013 and 2019 almost 70% of all referrals came from just 20 countries. You consistently have the same countries at the top of those lists. At the moment, if you look at 2013 to 2019, the top two countries were Albania and Vietnam. So international absolutely has a role to play in building resilience in communities, so that people do not feel the need to travel thousands of miles, where they are at great risk from and vulnerable to traffickers and smugglers.

The second issue is because of global supply chains. As consumers we are often buying products that are the result of forced labour. That is all to do with the complexity of global supply chains, which can very often rest on the exploitation of workers. It is very important that international development can work in some of the countries, for example in the textile industry in Bangladesh, to build resilience and reduce the likelihood of forced labour being in products in the UK.

Lastly, it is a more general thought. Whether it is organised crime or the interconnectedness of international trade, an international response and a multinational response is absolutely necessary. Whether it is the work that the FCDO funds through the United Nations University on Delta 8.7,



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the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Trafficking Persons, or the UN Voluntary Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, there are lots of different ways in which international effort can reduce the likelihood of modern slavery in the UK.

Christian Guy: I agree. This is a collective problem. Failure overseas does have a significant impact here. We have seen a growing number of British nationals being brought into this as well, so there is, sadly, a “made in Britain” element to this as well. You see the direct targeting of the UK by organised crime for the exploitation of people here.

Aside from that human cost and that trade in misery, there was a report the Government published a few years ago looking at the economic hit as well. Even when we thought the problem was only 10,000 to 13,000 people in the UK—I think now that is probably one in 10; it is over 100,000, based on some police data we have at Justice and Care—the Government’s own figures suggested it was a £3 billion to £4 billion problem, whether it was policing costs or health costs; we also see a lot of benefit fraud. Failure to deal with this overseas has a direct impact at the Treasury as well as in terms of human misery and suffering. We have to see this as a connected issue.

Q38 **Chair:** If I could turn to ICAI’s review, Dame Thornton, I would be interested to hear what your view is on ICAI’s review and the Government’s response.

Dame Sara Thornton: In terms of the recommendations, there are several that I would strongly support, and I am very pleased that the Government have accepted those. The emphasis on a strategic, systematic approach rather than a scattergun approach is absolutely essential. The focus on evaluation of what works is really important, and also the importance of survivor engagement. There are really good recommendations, and it is really great to see that the Government have accepted them.

The UK’s profile internationally as a leader is somewhat threatened by the cuts in ODA that are just about to bite. That is a concern. It was right at the time. Our leadership in international development has provided a platform for more general international leadership, but I fear that might be at risk.

If I might say something about recommendation 5, which is about engagement with the private sector, it is very important that there is that link with international development. One of the practical ways that I have been hearing that can make a difference relates to when I have been looking at global supply chains with brands and supermarkets in this country. While they fully accept that they are responsible for due diligence, I am persuaded that in some countries where it is much harder for them to operate there is more of a role for Government to both support and advocate for those brands. That is a really important



recommendation, and thinking about how Government work with the private sector internationally is a key area.

Christian Guy: One of the things I liked about the review was the way it contextualised modern slavery, because it is so easy to think of modern slavery as this issue on the to-do list that is very separate. We need to recognise that it is a driver of many of the priorities that the Government have set out, whether that is on climate change, global health, security, girls' education and training or economic development. If we do not deal with slavery, it can undermine efforts and increase the challenges in those areas too. I liked the way that they contextualised that. We have to start treating slavery as a feeder problem into the other international issues we want to tackle, rather than a separate point.

I like the point about momentum. It is right to say the UK has led. If you compare things to a decade ago, we are in a much stronger position because of political leadership that has come from the top level. I agree we need a stronger evidence base about the long-term impact of what works. Charities and NGOs on the front line need to sharpen up when it comes to understanding impact. Government should push charities getting public funds, particularly. We want to really home in on their understanding of what is working or not.

I agree about a more systems-based approach within Whitehall, because sometimes it can be a bit disjointed. I also support the idea that survivors can really shape the strategy. We also need to look at the way the private and public sector work together, whether that is business or charities, to unlock progress. We need more focus on the way we can strengthen law enforcement efforts overseas, because unless we dismantle this business model of trafficking and help countries to do that, we will be constantly responding to the flow of movement of people. I was pleased they welcomed and accepted all of them—they partially accepted some of them—but there is a lot more to do, particularly from Government.

Q39 **Chair:** Sara, you mentioned some examples of things you welcomed in the review, but the Government's response also contains some quite clear statements of intent on modern slavery. Do you think those statements were backed up by enough detail of practical action?

Dame Sara Thornton: While there is some detail, more detail would have been helpful. The response was made ahead of what we understand to be the impacts of those ODA cuts. Although the information is not public yet, I know from an example I can give later on that the cuts to GFEMS will have a significant impact on a lot of their programmes in a lot of Commonwealth countries.

Christian Guy: The new cross-Government statement on modern slavery that is due to come soon has to involve international. We must not now separate what we do with our overseas aid budget and what we do at home. We have to make sure that is more coherent. I thought they were



actually very open in the response. I was pleased it was not defensive and just threw out a lot of stuff that tried to justify their position. In the end, this will come down to whether someone at the very top wants to make it happen and push this through. I hope we see the action. We saw promising noises coming out of the G7, which we can obviously touch on. I am hopeful, but we need that to translate from words on a page to proper action and investment, which will now be harder in the context of what is happening with the ODA investment.

Q40 Chris Law: Former Prime Minister Theresa May made it quite clear a couple of weeks back in Parliament the pressing need for modern slavery to be at the front and centre of the agenda; it was not mentioned as one of the seven key priorities. Tackling modern slavery involves many Government Departments and agencies, but how well do these agencies co-ordinate their work, and how effective are they?

Dame Sara Thornton: You are absolutely right. When Theresa May was Home Secretary, she was absolutely clear that the response had to be cross-Government. That was absolutely right. The report suggests that has worked well. I have regular meetings with the migration and modern slavery envoy, and with the FCDO and the Home Office bit that deals with international. There is good work across Government there.

In terms of the future, I really welcome the new, refreshed strategy that has been announced, which is going to be developed. I saw the Home Secretary a few weeks ago, and was saying to her that it is absolutely essential that it is cross-departmental. One of the concerns I have had is that the inter-departmental ministerial group on modern slavery no longer meets. At one point when it was meeting, it actually performed the UK's national rapporteur function on modern slavery, which is part of our ECAT obligation. It is now no longer meeting; that responsibility is undertaken by the Home Secretary herself, which may be some cause for concern. Inter-departmental work is absolutely key.

In my own work, I come across areas such as child criminal exploitation, where the Home Office is doing good work, but so is the Department for Education. Sometimes we find ourselves trying to bring those two Departments together to make them both aware of what they are doing.

Christian has just mentioned the G7. He and I worked together on that. What has struck me about the G7 communique, which is excellent, is that in paragraph 29 it commits to dealing with forced labour, but in fact it is a Trade Minister lead. If you think about it in the UK, the expertise is in the Home Office and the FCDO. It is a really practical example of why it is going to be really important for people to be working across departmental boundaries.

The other thing I will say about Whitehall is that it is of course not just about inter-departmental work in Whitehall. It is also thinking about policy to delivery, from the national to the local. We know that frequently in public policy that is not a very smooth transition, so as well as thinking



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about side to side across Government, we also need to think about policy from Whitehall out to local delivery.

Christian Guy: I agree with so much of that. Having sat in Government I have seen that, without the drive from committee leaders to bring Departments together and push people together, things can fade. We have seen enormous progress on this compared to where we were a decade ago. It is an international priority and the UK had led that effort, but because of the nature of the crime, if you take your foot off the gas, things go backwards fast and organised crime groups and their trafficking networks take a grip, and other factors that you need to keep pressing down on re-emerge. I would like to see more drive and co-ordination between the Departments.

We also need to look at standards of implementation. We spend funds, and not enough charities are forced to really account for them and prove that they are effective. We need to really evaluate that. Every charity getting public funds should be subject to independent evaluations and having a look at what really works. Whitehall can drive that. Things like the taskforce that Theresa May used to chair from the very top of Downing Street bring people together and create momentum. If we just leave this to Departments to do their own work, you end up with the pots and programmes and a lack of communication. We have made big progress, but if we are to move forward and commit action to what the Government have said in response to this review, it needs proper co-ordination from the very top in Whitehall to start the ball rolling.

Q41 **Chris Law:** Sara, can you explain how forced labour might appear within international supply chains?

Dame Sara Thornton: Unfortunately, I would argue that forced labour is pervasive in international supply chains. The calculation is that about \$350 billion of products are tainted, whether that is technology, apparel, seafood, cotton, palm oil or coffee. The ILO calculates that 16 million people are in labour exploitation in the private sector. That is one in 500. I sometimes say to business, "If you haven't found it, you probably haven't looked hard enough". It is also the case that the pandemic has highlighted these vulnerabilities. This really strong downward pressure on price in these global supply chains can unfortunately frequently result in exploitation. You have these very fragmented, heavily outsourced supply chains. You have issues such as the vulnerability of migrant labour in some countries. There are a whole range of structural issues that mean it is absolutely key that there is political will to tackle this.

Q42 **Chris Law:** Most consumers would be horrified to realise what they are buying ends up with the misery of millions of people at the supply end who are not getting the voices heard. What are the risks to UK businesses of not understanding how their supply chains are compromised, and how can UK businesses mitigate these risks?



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Dame Sara Thornton: There is that risk of consumer pressure, and we have seen examples of that. There can be reputational damage through media coverage and NGO coverage. There are also more pressing issues, because I would argue that forced labour is a material risk to business. The best businesses are beginning to realise that. It might be because of the US approach on import bans that that actually becomes a material risk to the business. The US has a process and a law whereby it can ban goods from being imported that are the product of either forced labour or child labour. That becomes a material risk to business.

We have also been doing some work thinking about investments and insurance. What is the role of investors in asking those due diligence questions? What is the role of insurance companies in asking those sorts of questions? If you cannot insure something, you cannot finance it. We are thinking about those different pressures on business. I would argue that there is a material risk to the businesses, and it is only going to get greater.

A point worth making is that 20 years ago businesses did not take environmental risks seriously; they do now. Ten years ago they did not take cyber risk seriously; they do now. I would argue that when we look back at 2021, we will think, "Why did we not take forced labour risks more seriously?"

To answer your second question about what business should be doing, it is about absolute commitment to the avoidance of forced labour, which means thinking about due diligence. It means being very serious about that, and about worker voice and worker empowerment. It means working with NGOs, particularly internationally, on the ground. It is also about looking at social order and at special training for key roles, and thinking about sharing information and intelligence about risk. It means thinking about what the true cost of labour is in a product, so not just the price but how much it would have cost to be made. It is about taking seriously human rights and due diligence in all its aspects, including forced labour, at that board level. There is a whole range of things that business can and must do.

Christian Guy: I agree. At the moment the risk is too low. We have put legislation into place but we have not quite followed through with the teeth that are needed. At the moment it is quite easy to ignore the need to publish statements. There are some businesses doing some outstanding work to actually lead, but it is one of those areas where Government do not have to write an enormous cheque to make a difference. We are looking for those areas right now, in the context of Covid.

If we can work with business and hit a scale of good recruitment and proper labour practices without the need to spend billions to get there, we could really achieve results. If businesses do not choose to lead, there are others calling for things like disqualification of directors, credit rating



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downgrades and banning people from public contracts. We have seen the US action at the border to target imports. There are options in front of us that we should use if people will not play ball.

We remember the horse meat scandal years ago, and how much outrage there was internationally, or at least in the UK, when we thought we were eating horse, not beef. We are talking about slaves in supply chains. We need to generate some of that reaction again and ensure that in the boardrooms, at that top level, there is a real risk to not getting this right. We can get there.

Q43 Chris Law: Can you tell me if we have enough sanctions or legislation in place to protect consumers around this? If not, what would you suggest should be in place?

Dame Sara Thornton: A lot of the things that I was suggesting were in that voluntary space. There is a role for more legislation. Christian just referred to the requirement for businesses to write modern slavery statements. That applies to businesses with a turnover of more than £36 million in this country, but Government have made announcements to toughen up and tighten up those laws. That is necessary. We should look at the import ban approach that the US takes.

We should also think about the responsibility of a brand for what happens in its supply chain. At the moment there is no responsibility. It might be that it is too far to go for a duty-to-prevent law, which is sometimes suggested, but we should at least think about some sort of joint responsibility that means brands cannot just turn their back on what is happening in their supply chain; there is some sense of joint responsibility for the abuses that happen. There is a range of legislation that could be considered, which would all protect consumers in the end, but there is an awful lot that business can do to get ahead of the curve before the need for legislation.

Q44 Chris Law: There has been a lot of news and press regarding the situation with the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, which has brought a lot of awareness, but there is some difficulty in getting more information. How can the Government gather better evidence on the drivers of modern slavery?

Christian Guy: One of the challenges is to use the China example and deal with it, but to also recognise, as Sara has said, that it goes much further. At the moment we are too responsive to modern slavery. We spend a lot of money reacting to it, whether it is here, overseas or both. We can become more proactive and understand what is driving it and causing it. We are going to make progress quicker. The Government are well placed to do that, with the resources and timeframes. If you are looking at value for money for every pound the taxpayer spends, understanding how you can prevent this and what is causing it is a much more efficient way of spending money as well.



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We can do a few things. One is that we have to get our hands on better hard data. We still do not quite understand enough about how people are recruited, what the factors are, where they are moved, and then how organised crime works together across regions. Governments are getting better at dealing with data internally, but sharing that data overseas and working together is still fairly poor at some levels. We have to get better data if we want to really understand what is going on out there, especially on the drivers in key areas. We do not yet recognise enough things like child marriage and other factors that are hard to control.

Secondly, on research, there are some good initiatives under way that Government have funded. Looking at those drivers specifically, whether it is labour regulations, the impact of education, a lack of jobs or corruption, there are so many drivers we think we know exist, but through research, pilots and evaluation, Government could, within a few years, really develop a very strong library evidence base for what is causing this problem in very key parts of the world. We need to work internationally with other countries to come together and understand what is going on, because if we just see this as a problem within our borders or we just let others deal with it overseas without that co-ordination, we will fail to address the drivers. I would particularly want to see data, research and international partnerships being a key feature of what we do to prevent this, rather than keep spending hundreds of millions of pounds. It is like Whac-A-Mole; you are just trying to respond the whole time and it is not as strategic as it could be.

Q45 Mr Sharma: Good morning, all. Since this review it has been announced that there will be an overall reduction to the aid budget. What impact would terminating existing programmes have on the fight to tackle modern slavery?

Dame Sara Thornton: We talked about Theresa May's tremendous leadership internationally in respect of this. I noted that in Parliament she has recently raised the 80% funding cut to the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery. There is a real concern about that. It will make a massive impact on individual programmes, but it also seems to me that a lot of these programmes have sunk costs as you establish various programmes. It seems a waste of money in terms of core principles of value for money. There is a real concern about that. In terms of the UK's leadership in the world, this cut undermines our position to claim that leadership.

Let me give you an example from the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery. This was created back in 2017. It does a lot of work in Commonwealth countries such as India, Bangladesh, Kenya and Uganda. Talking to them, they were told last year that they faced a 28% cut, but in April this year they were told they were going to have an 80% cut. That basically means that any UK-funded programmes are going to have to finish straightaway, and that is of great concern.



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Here are a few examples of the sorts of programmes that we are talking about. They work with the International Justice Mission in India, trying to protect children against child sex trafficking. That programme is severely impacted. That is of grave concern, because child trafficking has of course been a real issue in India because of the vulnerabilities as a result of the pandemic.

Similarly, they work with BRAC in Bangladesh, which is about supporting very vulnerable workers in the textile industry. Again, it is looking likely that that will not be able to go ahead.

A third example is work with IOM, with people who may be migrant workers to the Gulf. There is a lot of work about trying to support, help them and protect them from the very exploitative ways they get recruited. Again, that is cut. These are very practical things about trying to protect the most vulnerable workers in the world.

The last point I would make about the problem with this is that there was a really excellent report published a few months ago by the UN University. I think it was commissioned by the FCDO. It was called *Developing Freedom*, and it basically makes the argument that tackling modern slavery really contributes to sustainable development, because it protects and maximises people's economic agency. It is about that sense in which spending money on modern slavery programmes actually has an exponential effect across all of international development.

For those sorts of reasons, I am really very concerned about it. At the moment we do not know too much information about the impact on individual programmes, but from what I know from GFEMS, I am very concerned about it.

Christian Guy: It undoubtedly makes it harder in some respects. Sara has touched on the global fund that funds organisations, including mine through the Norwegian Government; it used to be DFID funding. These cuts are here. The picture is still emerging. We have to work hard to make sure they are temporary and that we do reinvest again, because if you take the foot off the pedal, this problem will only get worse.

There is, though, now a chance to understand more about what works through research into the drivers, because when we do increase investment again in preventing modern slavery, we want to be able to maximise the value there. We have to understand in these months and in the years to come, while investment has dialled down, what it is that we need to prioritise. How, for example, does modern slavery fit into those other priorities on climate, girls' and women's education, and good economic development? If we are serious as a country about things like the sustainable development goals and if we are serious about tackling these challenges abroad to make Britain stronger and safer at home, we need to ensure these cuts are temporary, but use the time now to really work out what we will do with more investment, so that we can be ready when it comes back on again.



Q46 **Mr Sharma:** You are both co-signatories of a joint letter calling for co-ordinating action by G7 leaders on forced labour. Do you think the commitments made at the G7 will result in action to address forced labour?

Christian Guy: I am hopeful, and it needs to. We saw that commitment in the communique about trade, which I thought was positive. The Biden Administration in particular is really pushing this. There is an opportunity to work together with the Americans now, to look not just at China but also at the broader issues. I am hopeful it will lead to action.

There is a bit of reluctance in the UK because of the need for post-Brexit trade deals and the way that certain countries that we might be looking to work with have an issue with forced labour. I will be interested to see how the UK walks that road. Nevertheless, with hundreds of billions of pounds scarred by forced labour, we have to get serious. I like the fact that the US has just looked at the solar panels being imported from Xinjiang and are taking real action at the border. Those sorts of moves will really help others to follow.

We have this 2030 commitment on the sustainable development goals to look at forced labour and to take action on it. It is now or never from the G7, and we have a big opportunity. I am hopeful, but all of us need to keep the pressure up, find ways of highlighting good practice and encourage Governments to lead, even when it sometimes gets difficult.

Dame Sara Thornton: I hope so too. We made the case both privately and publicly before the G7 summit, and were pleased to see the commitment in the communique. We will continue to make the case privately and publicly. It is really important that this is an opportunity for the G7, which is a substantial percentage of global GDP, to really make that commitment, think about what the measurable goals are, and what more can be done to harmonise the approaches. Trade is global, and when we are thinking about standards and laws, it would be really helpful if there was more consistency and more coherence.

Also, what more can we do in countries that may be struggling in terms of law enforcement and corruption? What more can we do as a G7 to strengthen their institutions? We also need to think about how, when you have the most egregious forms of state-controlled forced labour, we can make the strongest stand. We hope so and we will be continuing to argue that case.

Q47 **Mr Sharma:** We too hope so. What can the UK learn from other countries' approaches to tackling modern slavery?

Dame Sara Thornton: I have three thoughts. Our Modern Slavery Act in 2015 was genuinely ground-breaking, but of course nothing stands still. If you look at the Australian Modern Slavery Act, passed in 2018, it is tougher. For example, it includes not just a business's operations and its supply chains, but also its financial investments and lending. That is



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something the UK should think about, if we are going to use the leverage that the financial services sector has. That would be a good thing.

The second area, which I have mentioned already, is that the US approach of what are legally called withhold release orders but are known as import bans are being seen to be very effective. As of March this year, there were 48 active release orders; a lot focus on China, but it is not just China. The advantage of the withhold release order is that you can have civil society, NGOs and a variety of people feeding into customs and border protection, saying, "We have a concern". Customs and border protection will then investigate it and, if appropriate, put on a withhold release order. They will argue that it has an exponential effect. You do not have to seize many goods to force business to think again. There are already examples where the insurance business's approach to marine and cargo insurance is changing because of this increased risk of imports staying in the docks in Baltimore and not going into the US.

I know this Government are looking at it. They have not said yes or no. There is a bit of concern about it being a blunt instrument, but it is something we should look at. My understanding is the Americans are, through their free trade agreements, also requesting that Canada and Mexico take the same approach. It might well be that this is a gathering momentum.

I mentioned the Gulf states. There has often been an issue about migrant labour there, both domestic and industrial. Bahrain has been leading work in those Gulf states to think about how that kafala system can be reformed. They have introduced flexi-visas, which has meant that people are not tied to their employer. It is small steps that we can encourage, multilateral engagement, to make things better for those most vulnerable workers. Ideally they should not have to go to other countries to earn money, but while they do feel that need, what more can we do to make them less vulnerable to exploitation when they get there?

Christian Guy: It is a big question. We can learn an awful lot from others, because we are all facing the same problem. We have to learn. I like the US approach in terms of its leadership analysis. They publish the TIP report—the Trafficking in Persons report—annually. The next one is due imminently. That really says as a country, "We are serious about understanding what is going on, what we want to prioritise and how our money is used". That TIP report is strong. It profiles every major country, ranks them, and it says, "Are we getting value for money from our aid programmes?" That is a really good statement of intent. I like the fact they are using the Tariff Act, as Sara has mentioned, on withhold release orders. I like their T visa, where they really support survivors to stay in a country if they co-operate with police, and help them to find the time to recover.

We see front-line practice and innovation everywhere. There is just such good innovation, and we see it through the countries we work in at



Justice and Care. There are specialist tribunals in Bangladesh that are being set up to move cases through faster, whether it is technology being used through cyber investigations. I like the fact that certain countries bring prosecutors in right at the start to almost direct and shape investigations with policing, which is not something we do here. There is a lot out there that we can learn from, but, if I was sat in Government, that TIP report would be a really interesting thing to not necessarily duplicate but to learn from and to prioritise, to find that good practice.

The UK needs to adopt that posture of learning and listening, because too often we think we can solve problems with our chequebooks that other countries are facing. With this issue, when we get round the table and work things out with other countries, rather than do things to other countries, we learn a lot and we make progress quicker.

Q48 Mr Sharma: Do you think the time has come, six years after the 2015 Modern Slavery Act, after the improvements in the Australian Act and the US approach, for us to review our Modern Slavery Act and bring some more progressive changes into it?

Dame Sara Thornton: The Government made the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act two years ago and published a report. They supported some of the recommendations in that independent review and there have been subsequent announcements. For example, the toughening up and the tightening up of section 54, the requirement for modern slavery statements. There is already some work in train. The policy and evidence centre needs to do a proper review of all the legal aspects, because some of those have worked and some have not.

At the moment, the challenge, notwithstanding the fact that the Government have announced they are going to amend parts of the Modern Slavery Act, is just getting parliamentary time. For example, there was nothing in the Queen's Speech this year that suggested any legislation in this session, so we are already looking at Session 3. I completely agree that there need to be more amendments. The big question is when that is going to happen.

Christian Guy: I was one of the advisers to the independent review. They took on some of the recommendations, but the great lesson of the Modern Slavery Act is that it is a piece of paper unless it is implemented and followed through, as with any legislation. The crime type is so fast that we are sometimes struggling to keep up. I would recommend regular reviews, because if we assume that the job was done six years ago—I do not think anyone does—it is easy to slip into that sense that we have the Act and we have done our part. It is not one of those sorts of problems; it evolves the whole time. You are absolutely right to say that we need to look at this again and learn from what others are doing, because it moves the whole time.

Q49 Chair: What challenges has the Covid-19 pandemic presented to tackling modern slavery?



Dame Sara Thornton: For those already in exploitation, it has heightened risk. It has made it harder sometimes to escape; issues such as domestic servitude have been very hidden. Many victims are already vulnerable. It heightened the vulnerability of those in exploitation.

It also created additional vulnerabilities. We talked about global supply chains. That could be the mass cancelling of orders in some sectors—textiles was a good example—and the impact that had on workers, but also there was the sudden rush for plastic screens, PPE and rubber gloves. Again, all those requirements for so much more product is a classic environment in which exploitation can flourish. That is a real concern. Also, when people are being trapped on the wrong side of borders internationally, when people have lost their jobs, they may just think that extremely exploitative work is the best option for them. The second point would be about increased vulnerability.

There is also the potential for disrupting support for victims and all the sorts of programmes of prevention. What is really good in the UK is that all the safehouses continued. Law enforcement continued. Charities continued to do their excellent work. There were real efforts across all sorts of organisations to minimise disruption, but, with the best will in the world, quite a lot of preventative work will have been disrupted, not just in the UK but internationally.

My last thought on the pandemic is that we all talk about building back better. One of the things I ask is that, when we think about building back better, let us think about protecting the most vulnerable people across the world, particularly those who are exploited in work.

Christian Guy: So much of what Sara says is what our experience is as well. The crime evolves as organised crime groups adapt. They exploit people in new ways, at a time where judicial systems and policing can be heavily disrupted. We have seen that increased desperation and vulnerability, which is a big problem coming forward. As the economic reality hits, both here and overseas, people are going to be much more at risk of being abused or exploited. It is harder to help, in a certain sense, when restrictions are in place.

Vulnerability is up, methods evolve and technology adapts. You also have countries that may refuse to look at this. It has to be one of the major priorities going forward in response to the pandemic, because if it is not, Britain will be targeted. We will see much more suffering, and the exploitation will increase. We can make sure that does not happen, but the pandemic makes it harder, and makes Government leadership more essential.

Chair: I thank very much our witnesses for our first panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon and Jennifer Townson.



Q50 **Chair:** We are now going to turn to our second panel of witnesses, from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I am delighted that we are joined this morning by Lord Ahmad, who is the Minister for south Asia and the Commonwealth, and Jennifer Townson, the migration and modern slavery envoy. Good morning, and thank you for joining us.

Why did the Government only partially accept ICAI's recommendations to mainstream modern slavery across the UK aid portfolio and strengthen partnerships with the private sector?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Good morning. I am glad to be here with you. First and foremost, let me say that we welcome the ICAI review. As you know, I am the Minister for ICAI as well. It is absolutely right that our international development spending, our progress and our priorities are scrutinised. I hope, as I have done previously on sessions with the IDC, to strengthen our work together on this important agenda.

I will say right from the outset that, when we have accepted the outcome and the recommendations, the reason there were some caveats on partially accepting recommendations 4 and 5 was not that we were in any sense rejecting them; we were merely not agreeing with some elements of the findings, because there is already work being done in that respect. For example, on the issue of mainstreaming modern slavery into other development programmes, as a Minister who looks after, for example, human rights, who is the Prime Minister's lead on preventing sexual violence in conflict, these are just a couple of examples of where modern slavery and human trafficking cannot be detached from what we are doing in those areas. Therefore, the issue of human trafficking and modern slavery is very much looked at in an overarching way, on all the programmes that we undertake.

On the side of humanitarian support and relief, let us not forget that, where you have humanitarian crises, trafficking and modern slavery is used as a real criminal tool to make the lives of those who are going through these challenges worse. On the issue of partnerships on modern slavery, there is always more to do. I am a great believer in working hand in glove with the private sector. Our support, for example, to the global fund illustrates the importance of bringing the public and private sector together, and I am fully committed to this. I know through the Home Office and Victoria Atkins' team there are regular meetings with the private sector in ensuring priorities are being met. We have been on the front line on ensuring companies also declare and look at modern slavery and human trafficking within their own corporate statements.

I am the first one to accept that we can never rest on our laurels. Just hearing the back end of the last presentation, we can never stop looking at this. We must remain focused. To be very clear, we accept what has been put forward by ICAI; the only reason we added caveats was because we did not agree with the assessment that nothing had been done. There is work that had been done, which I have illustrated through a couple of examples.



Q51 **Chair:** When will the Government publish their statement on the objectives for the use of official development assistance to tackle modern slavery?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: First and foremost, we already publish annual statements in this regard as well. We published our modern slavery strategy back in 2014 and the Act in 2015. We had some degree of institutional knowledge at the Home Office—I was there—under the former Prime Minister, when she was Home Secretary. We will continue to engage with partners regularly through civil society, et cetera, on how we can do more in this area.

Again, I totally agree with the principle that we should not just put markers down specifically. We need to be looking at this constantly. We will review the modern slavery strategy and respond to ICAI's recommendation specifically to publish a clear statement of our objectives. We will also be meeting as Ministers between the Home Office and the FCDO every six months, including on progress against ICAI's recommendation. We are looking. We already make some formal statements. There is a review also being conducted, which will be published in 2022 by the Home Office. That will also give further details of our priorities in terms of how we align both our domestic and international work.

Q52 **Chair:** We have heard from other witnesses that there have been some difficulties in collating particularly data, information and research on modern slavery. I would be interested to know how you envisage addressing these difficulties.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I would say right from the outset that I agreed with that assessment. When we look at modern slavery, as the Minister responsible from an international dimension, that remains a major challenge in terms of how we invest in further data and ensure that we can act on the evidence. It remains something that we need to strengthen with our international partners. We are working through various UN agencies as well to strengthen the data on which we can then act and focus our support.

It is not just about money. It is often about technical support as well. It is also about people support, so we can address the needs. When we look at the wider context of human trafficking and modern slavery, there is no one-size-fits-all for any country, or, dare I say, for individuals. Every survivor needs to be treated as an individual. We need to be focused on supporting programmes and projects based on evidence, which are very much focused on the individual needs of each survivor.

Q53 **Chair:** Jennifer, would you like to response to either of those points?

Jennifer Townson: I do not have very much to add to what the Minister said, but on that last point around research and evidence, it really is the case that it is not a UK issue to see gaps. It is recognised that there are some quite big gaps globally in terms of understanding. This has come



out in some of the previous sessions, in terms of understanding the drivers, which are multiple, various and highly interconnected in many cases, and, critically, what works. We are still globally at a relatively early stage of understanding particularly that last piece. It is a really key part of a lot of the programmes that we have at the moment, which is to try to ensure that we are learning from a constant feedback loop and drawing lessons from implementations as we go forward.

Q54 Mr Sharma: Good morning, Minister and Jennifer. ICAI told us that gender, caste, age, disability and religion all impact vulnerability to modern slavery. In that context, what steps are the Government taking to improve data collection and refine programmes to address the different vulnerabilities that people face?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: It is good to see you, Virendra-ji. I agree with the premise of your question. When we look at the issue of modern slavery and human trafficking, it comes back to the point both Jennifer and I have just made. The data available to us, particularly in an international context, needs more investment. There is money that we are making available to see how we can strengthen our own data set so we can become more focused.

At a very strategic level what we are doing through the merger of the Foreign Office and DFID into a single structure within country will also assist us to work very closely on the individual needs and requirements of particular countries based on the very criteria you have suggested. Issues of gender, religion and caste also arise. I know in my own patch, in south Asia, how much that is actually a key factor in determining opportunities and addressing issues of modern slavery. We must get quite specific and focused on individual data.

The work we do with organisations such as the ILO and UNICEF, and the collation and sharing of data, will lend itself to better qualitative data, because it is not just about quantitative data. I stress this point: it has to be qualitative data that allows us to address the specific issues of vulnerable communities, and they can be discriminated against based on exactly the criteria. Let us not forget that child labour is not even paid labour; it is pure enslavement in many parts of the world. That needs to be addressed quite specifically. There are a lot of structural issues we need to be dealing with.

The other thing I would just add, accepting that there is so much more work to be done in this area, is about how we work with the UN. I am a firm believer in a multilateral approach to solving issues, because we bring expertise together. The UN resident co-ordinator approach in some of the most vulnerable conflicted-affected zones and our complementary structure through the FCDO will lend itself to bringing forward a lot more of this qualitative data in-country. We are making various investments in this regard, but clearly the quality of data, not just the quantity, will determine how we move forward on addressing specific discriminatory practices when it comes to human trafficking.



Q55 Mr Sharma: You touched on it, but there is more room to elaborate. How do the Government intend to integrate modern slavery across the UK aid portfolio?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I gave you a couple of examples, Virendra-ji. It is absolutely essential. If I take a step back, that is my approach to the thematic issue. You cannot silo one issue and believe that does not have a knock-on impact in what we are doing. When we talk of spending on girls' education, for example, one of the key components of why we want to spend more on girls' education is also to alleviate modern slavery. This is not just about stopping human trafficking, i.e. people trafficked from one region or one country to another. Of course that is a priority, but in countries where we focus, it is also about how we can stop bonded labour and enslavement in particular industries and sectors.

I am a keen believer—I think you share the view, and it is the view of our Prime Minister—that one of the biggest contributions we can make in alleviating modern slavery and human trafficking is through investment in countries themselves. A primary area of focus must be on the issue of education for all, but particularly for girls. More often than not they are denied education. Again, I speak specifically to some of the geographic areas I look after. I have directly seen the impact of positive programmes in Bangladesh, for example, where we have invested in partnerships, coming back to the point that was raised by Theo, with the private sector, civil society and other key partners on the ground, which has seen, for the first time in a family's history, a girl getting an opportunity to get a basic education in terms of language, maths and technical skills.

Coming back to your point on how it is shared, we now need to take some of these core projects. If a project is working in a country where we have invested, how can we scale it up to the benefit of that country and the support we give, but also see whether it has application in other countries. In doing so, when we are tackling the issue and the scourge of modern slavery, we undoubtedly have to look at it as a whole. Component parts of our work within a whole range of areas, including on girls' education, are focused on doing exactly that.

Q56 Mr Sharma: How will the FCDO be including the voices of survivors into its approach moving forwards?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I have a very short, sharp answer, but I hope it is an appropriate one for you, Virendra-ji. We should do that and do it as soon as possible. I was saying to our team that I have seen the benefits, with my PSVI hat on, of bringing survivors in, not at the end: "Right, we have this great policy and strategy. Can you help us now?" We must bring them in right at the start of the programme. Anyone who has met any survivor, be it of sexual abuse, of sexual violence in conflict or of human trafficking or modern slavery, knows that there is no one better than this person who has gone through this terrible crime against them as an individual, who has not only survived it but then can talk about it.



We need to strengthen their ability to allow us to build up, first, some of the questions we have already had on the evidence base, because they are direct experience and insights. Secondly, there is no better person or people who can advise and work with Government than survivors.

The short answer is that I want it fully integrated in our approach. I totally agree with the recommendation that ICAI has made on this. I have seen practical examples of where it is working directly with us. I can quote you a couple of examples. For example, the Work in Freedom programme has a specific focus on women within the Middle East and India. We are also investigating how research on education and social protection can protect children from interventions in the best way possible.

It is programmes like that, whether in Asia, where we funded the Freedom Fund, which is in places such as Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand, that we bring survivors in at the start of that. Yes, let us allocate money and technical support, but in the planning and priorities we must include survivors at the start of the process, not just in terms of helping us deliver outcomes.

Jennifer Townson: On the point on survivor voices, this is very well taken in terms of the recommendation. In my role, through engaging with a range of partners internationally but also in the multilateral sphere, some of the most powerful interventions in various events that I have been involved in have exactly been that—from people who have lived experience, have come out the other side and are able to advise—and have focused in the effort of Governments, civil society organisations or major UN agencies.

I have one last point to build on what Lord Ahmad was saying around the integration of these issues across a range of Government activity, not just development aid programming but more widely than that. Because this is such an interconnected issue, we are also making sure that we engage closely with our colleagues who are looking at the HMG approach on serious organised crime, so the international aspects of that, which speaks to the law enforcement piece but also to the mechanics and logistics of the trade of human trafficking.

Dame Sara made reference to a piece of research that we funded through the UN University, the *Developing Freedom* report. It is very powerful in how it draws out that if you take a fundamental approach tackling issues, not seeing it as a side issue but seeing it as a central issue, you would actually target 113 of the SDGs, which is a very significant proportion of the total number of SDGs. In terms of both of these approaches, it is a set of recommendations that we really welcome and are very keen to work with.

Q57 **Mr Sharma:** What impact will the reductions in UK aid have on the UK's ability to tackle modern slavery through aid programmes?



Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Undoubtedly when you cut the programme, as we have had to do so— I do not hide away from the fact there is less money being spent than was being spent previously. That is a result, as has been articulated by myself and colleagues in both Houses, of the situation we have found ourselves in economically; those are well known to all members of the Committee. I will not take up time and go through those again, as you are fully aware of those.

However, it is important that the Foreign Secretary highlighted seven thematic areas. Within those, whether we are talking about open societies or humanitarian support, all these elements are in the framework of what we can do when it comes to modern slavery and human trafficking. We have some very good practical examples of how we are working in-country and delivering, notwithstanding a reduction of overall spend. The £10 billion is a sizeable amount we are spending overall on overseas development assistance. I have been at the forefront of our engagement with civil society partners. I have been talking directly to multilateral partners on this particular agenda, and indeed those involved with helping us deliver the outcomes when it comes to our development support.

Yes, of course everyone is disappointed that we have had to make the reduction, albeit on a temporary basis. Equally, what we have sought to do, Virendra-ji, when we have looked at each programme—I have certainly done this on my patch—is to go to the core of each programme and see what is crucial for its sustainability for the medium and long term. As we are able to increase extra funding, we will be able to build on the core element of each programme and project.

We do an extensive amount across various areas where, coming back to an earlier point, modern slavery and human trafficking have a major part in what we are seeking to achieve. It remains a key priority. I am sure all of you followed the G7. That was very much our presidency under our Prime Minister. I can assure you, as someone who has been involved with getting together communiques, it is not the easiest thing getting partners to agree language. The fact that there was a real commitment at the G7 on alleviating modern slavery and facing the challenge and addressing the challenge of human trafficking underlines our political will and commitment as a Government to not only prioritise human trafficking and modern slavery in terms of what we are doing on our own development support, but also in terms of our international partners as well. The G7 statement was illustrative of that.

Q58 **Mr Sharma:** I like your phrase that it is a temporary reduction; I hope that it is not a long temporary reduction and it comes quicker than expected. Has modern slavery programming been given a specific ODA allocation for the 2021-22 financial year?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: First of all, we stand by our commitment that was made under the former Prime Minister in terms of the £200 million that we said we would be spending. There was no defined period



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of time that was given within that cycle. In every spending round we prioritise, and that continues to be the case.

In the programmes, while we are still finalising a degree of in-country programmes, I can share with you that, in the overall spend of our priorities, modern slavery and human trafficking does have specific focus on in-country programmes, as well as some of the support we are giving through international programmes—for example our support to organisations such as UNICEF. That will continue.

It is a one-year settlement, and a one-year settlement is quite challenging. I also wear the joyous hat of being the Minister for finance within the FCDO, so I am very appreciative of the spending cycles and spending reviews. I can assure you there is no dilution of intent, prioritisation or indeed spending. The commitments we have previously given quite publicly on our spend in this area are very much alive.

If I can add a caveat, which again will not surprise you, the last year has been challenging, both in terms of coming back to where we started and the evidence base on how we focus our spend. How can we make every pound and dollar spent count to ensure that we are meeting the objective? That has been really difficult. When you are not able to engage and be out in the field extensively, it provides an added challenge. What happens is that the most vulnerable are impacted. Without a shadow of a doubt, issues of abuse of human rights, modern slavery internationally and discrimination against women and vulnerable communities have increased.

We are still in the midst of collecting the data, but the information is quite startling. The Covid-19 pandemic has been used in various parts of the world as a cover to make the situation on the ground that much worse. This year we retain our previous intent to prioritise and focus in on modern slavery. It has been a feature of what we are doing through both multilateral spend and in-country spend.

Mr Sharma: Chair, can I thank the Minister for his courteous way of addressing me, not only today but previously as well? I am grateful, Lord Ahmad, for your courteous approach towards me.

Q59 Chris Law: I want to go back to the question Virendra has just asked about the reductions in UK aid, because I am hearing a lot about political will and commitments, but what I heard in the earlier session this morning is up to 75% of cuts of one organisation, which surely means that the programmes that are in place will be cancelled and people will be directly affected on the ground who it was there to support in the first place.

I also want to add that it is utter nonsense that we have had to make those cuts, given that every G7 country is also experiencing the impact of Covid on the economy, but they have stepped up their commitments and increased. Again, what are the real impact of cuts of UK aid on the UK's



ability to tackle modern slavery? Undoubtedly we have already heard this morning that there is a real impact.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I am not sure whether I should call you Chris-ji—it brings back images of Honey G, but let us not go there right now; I remember that episode well. Chris, you are spot on. I do not shy away. Does the fact we are spending circa £4 billion less have an impact on programmes, projects and organisations? The short answer is yes. Whatever way you cut it, the fact is that there is less money available. That is why the engagement, which I have shared with you already, that we are doing directly with suppliers, civil society and multilateral partners has been at the forefront of trying to bridge a gap, which underlines our commitment while less is being spent. I accept the principle of what you are saying. Yes, the conversations have not been easy in certain respects. They have been pretty candid, but part of our job as Ministers is to try to communicate the fact that our commitment remains, even if in this particular year the money has been reduced.

On your premise that other partners are increasing and we are decreasing, the argument I present on that—I am sure this is something that has been put to you before—is that we start from a higher base. When I look at our multilateral support, whether it is through the UN or bilaterally, over the years our commitment to the 0.7% has ensured we are right up at the top of the pile in many instances when it comes to responding to humanitarian crises that occur, or support and delivery of development programmes.

The fact we have had to reduce it has of course caused concern on two fronts: what does this mean in the immediate term, and what does this mean for the long term? The immediate term means that there are certain programmes and projects that we are not able to continue, but we have sought, under the seven themes that the Foreign Secretary has highlighted, to prioritise accordingly—as I said, looking at programmes and projects to see how we can sustain the core of the programme and project to allow us the ability to scale up at the appropriate time when we can restore and come back to the 0.7%.

I know this is not the question you have put to me directly. Is there less? Yes, there is less; I accept that. Are there programmes and projects that have been impacted? Yes, there have. When it comes to modern slavery and human trafficking specifically, while we have the headline of the £10 billion, I would raise two elements. The Home Office has retained its commitment to £33.5 million on the modern slavery fund. I have already reiterated our commitment to the £200 million that has previously been declared. The fact is that the speed at which we have been able to look at addressing issues of human trafficking and modern slavery in the last 18 months has been quite extensively scaled back, because we have not been able to work on the ground as extensively as we would otherwise.

The two elements, to sum up, are that, yes, I agree that we have had to reduce programmes and projects and they have been cut and impacted, but in the work that we have done we have sought to go to the core of



programmes and projects to see how we can best sustain them, but also enhanced communication, working with key partners to see where we can bridge the gap. There is still a lot more to be done. Hopefully in the near future when we restore back to the 0.7%, it will allow us the flexibility to ratchet up what we are seeking to do.

The other thing I would add is that we need to be taking from the pandemic some of the things that we have learnt from it. When it comes to issues of modern slavery and human trafficking, we need to see what we can do in terms of our alleviation. In places such as Pakistan, I have been looking at education programmes, where there will be less on the capital spend, for example in building schools physically, and more investment on the technology platforms that allow us to provide for girls in certain challenging communities. Without going into detail, Chris, you will know from your own insights and experiences some of the cultural challenges that exist in certain parts of the world. Through that investment in technology infrastructure and platforms, we are able to perhaps provide an enhanced level of health and education provision. We are in the early stages of that.

Q60 Chris Law: Yesterday we also heard about the effects of cuts to girls' education and protecting the rights of women in Pakistan as well in our Select Committee work. I will come back to cuts in a second. Jennifer, how will the UK work with recipient countries to tailor effective interventions to country-specific challenges related to modern slavery?

Jennifer Townson: As we have heard in various answers as we have gone through so far, we have a range of broad partnerships. Broadly speaking, we might track them down into three main areas where we have a focus and we will maintain that focus.

The first is working with countries that are the source and origin of large numbers of nationalities that we find represented in the national referral mechanism in the UK. The second is looking for opportunities to work with countries where there is high incidence and high prevalence, which speaks to that international effort from the UK to address global prevalence in the context of the SDG targets. The third is enhanced and strengthened engagement via multinational and plurilateral organisations; it is not just working with UN bodies, the ILO and bodies like that. We have already referenced the context of the G7, but there are also subsets and lots of work that we have to build on, for instance amongst the Five Eyes partnership, when we are talking about transparency in supply chains. There has been a commitment among that group, which is something I hope that the work on the G7 trade track will be able to expand and broaden out.

It is a range of responses. As part of my role, I am here to complement the engagement of Ministers, but also the activity of the FCDO network. We have a lot of very committed and engaged members of staff in various regions around the world who are looking out for the opportunities to advance the agenda with host Governments, but also,



where that is more difficult—and it is obviously more difficult in a number of cases, because it is not one-size-fits-all—they are looking out for opportunities to also work with civil society organisations or subsets. If there is a federal issue, there is also an opportunity to work and begin to make progress with state authorities. It is a really multi-faceted approach, with those things at the core, but also taking a rightly opportunistic approach as well, where we can see opportunities to make common cause and build an international consensus and joint action.

Q61 Chris Law: With regards to the Integrated Review, we have heard a lot about its tilt towards Indo-Pacific. The issues of modern slavery in that region go from Vietnam into mainland China, with what is happening in Tibet and the Uyghur region with ethnic minorities. What specific areas of focus for tackling modern slavery exist in that region?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: You are spot on. When we look across that part of the world, the challenges are immense. It comes back to the point I made earlier about where we are both investing and focusing, but rather than doing it on a regional basis, we have to home in on specific issues and focus on what is relevant.

You have touched on the Pakistan session; I have just come back from Pakistan. Let us take the specific issue of forced marriage. It is about investing in-country on specific issues relating to forced marriage, in the context of particularly young girls being forced into marriages both in-country but also, regrettably and tragically, at times brought over to the UK. It is about how we break that chain and cycle. We are specifically investing on programmes and support in-country, which is linked directly to the impact of stopping issues of forced marriage and child labour.

Moving across the region, child labour in India and Bangladesh are major issues and challenges. Going further afield, yes, we are developing and strengthening our work in this respect. Hopefully by the end of this year we will also have strategic dialogue status with ASEAN. That will underline our focus not just on strengthening our work when it comes to trade and the economy, but the whole intention around that values piece.

One of the other hats I wear is as human rights Minister, and I can assure you that I was delighted by the fact that the Integrated Review very much referred to this issue of open societies and human rights. While the detail that will emerge over the coming weeks, months and years will be the assessment of how effective the Government have been, it is right that at the heart of our strategy we have this approach where the whole issue of strengthening human rights, the welfare of people and the values agenda is part and parcel of not just our strategy, which it is, through the integrated strategy, but also of the key delivery of programmes on the ground.

That extends not just to what we are doing in terms of ODA spend. It is specifically in terms of technical support we are providing in terms of reform of laws when it comes to issues of human trafficking. Coming back



a few countries, in the work we have done in Bahrain, for example, while there are still challenges on the human rights piece, it is our investment that has resulted in quite strategic and structural reforms in legislation in Bahrain that protects workers' rights. That has a knock-on effect to migrant workers coming in from places like Bangladesh and the east. Those are a few examples, in the time we have, that we are doing. The real outcome is how we home in on specific issues in countries, some of which I have illustrated, to really address the particular issue, which is systemic in a particular country or region of a country.

Q62 Chris Law: Those are really good examples that you have just shared. Will there be a reduced focus on tackling modern slavery in both south Asia and Africa as a result of the Indo-Pacific tilt, and will existing programmes in these regions be impacted by the aid cuts? I am sure you will have a quick answer to the second part, but could I just get some examples of what is going to happen with our reduced attention to south Asia and Africa?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As the Minister for south Asia, to use a cricket analogy I have gone in with a strong bat and made sure that both my defensive and offensive posture is very clear. In the programmes that we have in places such as Pakistan, we could be talking for ages here. There is a balance we need to strike within the context of human rights within Pakistan and the importance of investing in the most vulnerable communities. Rather than having two separate conversations, as I have done recently, we have really put them strategically together. The short answer is no.

Within Africa, I can also assure you, both through some of the work we are doing through our Commonwealth connections but also within the scope of Africa, that it does not take away from some of the important investments we are making within that. For example, we have a £10 million support programme for UNICEF, which is specifically focused on violence, abuse and exploitation in Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. Undoubtedly there is an Indo-Pacific tilt, but that is wider and broader than just some of the programmes. We are continuing to invest in that. Off the top of my head, there is the International Organization for Migration, which we work with in Nigeria. As you will know well, that is all about victims of trafficking in Libya being brought back to Nigeria. As you know, in the anarchy that gripped Libya we saw Libya being the main source of human trafficking through that particular area.

There are some really good examples. In the time we have, without going into specific statistics, there are some good outcomes. I was asked this in the House of Lords about a year ago. Very simply put, I take this view: when I speak in this way, does it make one iota of difference to the lives of anyone anywhere in the world? If through my investment of time and effort, you make the difference in one life, and if one pound changes the fortune of one person being stopped in human trafficking, then yes.



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Coming back to right where we started, the most qualitative outcome is determined by the best evidence we have.

In short, we will continue to invest in the programmes and projects we have in both Africa and Asia. We have the south Asia research fund, which works in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. We have the Work in Freedom programme, which I have already alluded to. These are very much part and parcel of our current spending and programmes, and those will continue.

Q63 **Chris Law:** Jennifer, we heard earlier about the importance of a cross-Government approach to modern slavery. What discussions are you having with other Departments about a strategic need for this, and to better address modern slavery?

Jennifer Townson: I sit in the FCDO. When I first took up this role it was sitting in the FCO and working with colleagues in DFID, so we already have some very concrete co-ordination in that we are now one group of policy officials under the FCDO. Although I sit in the FCDO, it is absolutely a given that our closest partners across Government are Home Office colleagues. The international effort must always be checking back to make sure we are hitting those core objectives, one being about how this relates to the situation in the UK. How does the domestic meet the international? Also, what is the effect on that global prevalence piece?

There is a very harmonious and pleasingly tight relationship across FCDO and Home Office on this score. Officials meet once a month in a cross-Whitehall co-ordination group, also drawing in other interested Departments. Principally, we have some reactive colleagues from the Department of Work and Pensions who are looking at international labour regulations and laws, and how that fits into the international piece. We have Cabinet Office colleagues, and in earlier sessions we have already touched on colleagues from the Department for International Trade, as we think more about that intersection with the piece around forced labour in supply chains.

In a number of years in the civil service—longer than I care to recall—this is actually one of the policy areas that I have worked in that has been the closest in terms of the working relationship across some of the key Departments.

Q64 **Chair:** Lord Ahmad, how regularly will the cross-Government reviews on modern slavery take place, and will you publish the results?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The next main statement, apart from the commitment that we have already given, will be on the review of the strategy in the spring of next year. I have already spoken to Victoria about this in the Home Office, so, in addition to Jennifer's engagement, I assure you that, as Ministers, we also talk.

Coming back to Chris's point, any statement we make has to be integrated so it is reflective of what is happening, for example, on issues



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of supply chains and whether it comes out of investment that the Home Office is making. It will also reflect how we are acting with international partners in this respect.

Just coming back, there needs to be a wider net, if I can put it that way. It is not just about us and the Home Office; as Jennifer said, as DIT evolves, particularly with new trade deals, we need to look at supply chains. I would also say it involves DCMS in terms of some of our technology outcomes. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the need to work in a more integrated fashion with the Department of Health. The list can go on. What we want to see from our strategy—the next clear statement will be in the spring of next year—will be an integrated sense of the information we share reflecting, coming back to where we started, the ICAI recommendations.

There is a great deal of work to be done. We are cutting-edge when it comes to issues of supply chains, and we are strengthening it. There is a new registry that the Home Office is bringing in. We need to be stronger. There is a huge opportunity for us to be world leaders on this. In a way, if I was to state my personal ambition—I underline this—there is real scope. I was speaking to the former Prime Minister a couple of days ago, just to assure the Committee that we still engage very much with Theresa May, who has been at the heart of this, both at the Home Office and when she was Prime Minister. That relationship continues, to see how we can continue to leverage her insight and experience in ensuring that our strategy really homes in on outcomes, both domestically and internationally.

Hopefully what you will get is reflective of a very integrated review of what we are doing. As I said, we stand by our commitments to what we have already said, both within the Act and in our commitments on producing regular statements. Equally, once the review is complete, this can never stop. We have to be ever evolving in our approach. As we get better in legislating or increasing opportunities, regrettably and tragically those who want to abuse human lives get better at their game. We need to also make sure that we are dynamic and evolving in our response.

Chair: Can I thank the Minister and all of our witnesses today for joining us?