

The Issue of Modern Slavery

What is modern slavery?

Modern slavery is the severe exploitation of other people for commercial gain, for example human trafficking; forced and early marriage, or when people become entrapped making our clothes and food. It engrained in our society and more often than not, we don't realise when it's occurring.

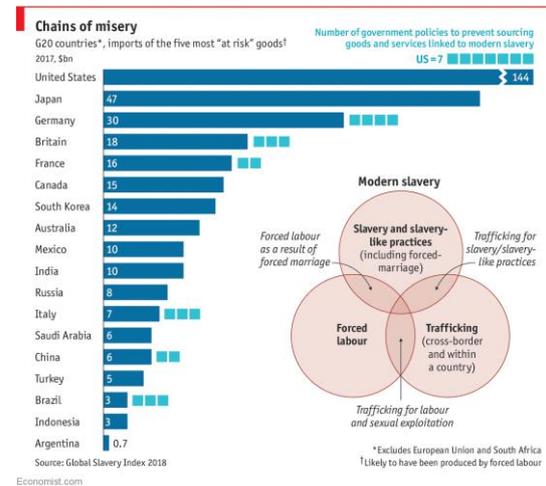
Present context

Slavery was abolished in the year 1981, with Mauritania becoming the last country to outlaw forced labour. Yet, rather alarmingly, 40 million are currently estimated to be trapped in modern slavery across the globe, with 25% of being children and 71% women and girls.

Modern slavery is often perceived as being a problem exclusively in poorer countries, however the consumers in the West rely on forced labour in the developing world to support supply chains. Some of the import industries most affected by forced labour are computers and mobile phones, cocoa, sugarcane, fishing and clothing. Central Asia's cotton industry is dependent upon migrant labourers, while in Turkmenistan, tens of thousands of people forcibly pick cotton in order to fulfil the state production quotas and in India, the vast brickmaking industry is built on the reliance of families who work in bonded labour.

Brazil has something known as a "dirty list", which publicises firms found to be using forms of modern slavery, which also blacklists them from public tenders. In addition to this, the European Union promotes and encourages socially responsible procurement. Walk Free Foundation places the UK as the country taking the most action to respond to modern slavery, with the addition of the 2015 "**Modern Slavery Act**". It joins France, the Netherlands and Australia as a handful of Nations which have introduced legislation with the aim of targeting modern slavery in the last decade.

Penal labour can also be regarded as another form of modern slavery, whereby prisoners are required to perform, typically manual labour. Prisoners have been put to work for centuries, be it dredging waterways in 18th century England, making arms in Soviet gulags or forced into countless mining and manufacturing schemes that still operate today. Some 560,000 prisoners were victims of forced labour to the benefit of private individuals or organizations in 2016, according to anti-slavery group Alliance 8.7. In the United States, penal labour is explicitly allowed, according to the 13th Amendment of the US Constitution: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." In the US and Japan, refusal to participate in forced labour is punishable by solitary confinement. Furthermore, in North Korea, where an estimated



200,000 people are currently held within prison camps, Amnesty International have alleged that inmates have been ordered to even dig their own graves. Major brands, including Victoria's Secret and IBM have also been known to use prison labour. This prison-industrial complex describes the mutually reinforcing web of relationships between governments and industry that allows penal labour to perpetuate. Whether penal labour is ethical as a punishment or simply exists to serve corporate interest is to be determined.

United Nations guidelines on how to treat prisoners, known as the "Mandela Rules", say that prisoners should not be held in 'slavery' and deserve a fair wage and decent working conditions. At the first **United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders**, held in Geneva in 1955, it was set that 28. "(1) No prisoner shall be employed, in the service of the institution, in any disciplinary capacity. (2) This rule shall not impede proper functioning of systems based on self-government, under which specified social, educational or sports activities or responsibilities are entrusted, under supervision, to prisoners who are formed into groups." As we can see, this second clause has been open to different interpretations from each Member States and clarity is greatly required regarding the true meaning of the clause.

Overall, it is clear that modern slavery is playing a large role in our society today. From being used as a form of punishment in our penal systems to being affiliated with major fashion brands. Many of the old guidance and resolutions previously debated in the UN are no longer applicable and have been exploited using loopholes. Thus, we as the human rights committee need to set a new precedent and rid our society of the horror that is modern slavery.

Points to consider:

- What steps can each Member State take in moving towards a world free from modern slavery?
- Is penal labour ever acceptable? What can we do regulate it?
- How can the guidances set at United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders be altered to present a clear stance on penal labour that isn't open to interpretation and exploitation?
- How should Member States handle multinational companies found to be using modern slavery?
- How can we support the victims, including child victims, of modern slavery?
- Why and where does slavery persist? Are there links between poverty and slavery?

Useful links:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/slavery/modern/modern_1.shtml

<https://iwoc.iww.org.uk/prison-labour/>

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/treatmentprisoners.pdf>

<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/which-countries-have-highest-rates-modern-slavery-and-most-victims>

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gashc4244.doc.htm>

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>