



**Christian
World Service**
ACTION AGAINST POVERTY
actalliance

**Submission on Consultation on Modern Slavery and Worker
Exploitation**

Christian World Service

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Introduction

Christian World Service is the aid and development organisation of the Anglican Church of New Zealand and Polynesia, Methodist Church of New Zealand, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, Christian Churches New Zealand and The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Our work began in 1945 with the first Christmas Appeal for relief efforts in Greece. We have a long tradition of funding emergency response, good quality local development and education and advocacy action in Aotearoa New Zealand on issues of concern. In the past year we funded over 20 partners running quality, local development programmes in 16 countries. CWS works together with our partner churches, supporters and local partners for a world free of poverty and injustice.

Respecting the rights of indigenous peoples is one of the cornerstones of good development and something which our organisation takes very seriously. As an organisation based in Aotearoa New Zealand, CWS is committed to honouring Te Tiriti O Waitangi and 'working alongside Māori for a just and equitable society, which acknowledges in its laws, institutions and public life Māori self-determination'.

CWS is a member of ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together), a coalition of 137 churches and faith-based agencies working in 127 countries and associated with the World Council of Churches.

Ending Modern Slavery and Worker Exploitation

CWS supports the drafting of new legislation to end slavery and worker exploitation. By putting strong legislation in place, New Zealand will be able to better meet its commitments under the international human rights instruments as well as contribute to global well-being. CWS is very aware of the great harm that can be done through slavery and worker exploitation from the stories and history of our local partners.

Some years ago CWS focused on child slavery and as part of the 'Set the Children Free Coalition' actively campaigned for what became ILO 182, the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. In the process we spoke to politicians, officials, representatives of the Wool Board, to churches and schools about the great harm caused to children by dangerous and exploitative work, often under bondage. We discovered how easy it was for children to produce rugs with child-free labour marks.

The overwhelming reason why children worked in these conditions was because of poverty. Their income helped support families where parents could not work for a variety of reasons and meant there was one less mouth to feed. For example, in India, children as young as six worked in matchbox making businesses. Six days a week, they (mostly girls) packaged matches, sitting on the floor in cramped conditions for a small business under threat from larger enterprises that used machines. Despite existing Indian law, the children were not in school. Unable to deprive the family of income, our partner provided them with schooling, education and healthcare on the one

day a week they were not working. DAWN also ran education programmes in schools and the community, encouraging children to stay in school and helping families find other incomes.

More recently Tamil Nadu partners are campaigning against the *Sumungali Thittam* scheme, set up in the textile industry of Tamil Nadu, India. In this scheme, young women work for three years for a fixed sum paid to their family to cover the costs of marriage. Middlemen negotiate the contracts with the families who are unaware of the consequences and may undervalue their daughter's education.

CWS is funding partners in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka working to end this exploitation from within the community. These local groups run awareness programmes with children and their parents, teaching them about human rights, including the right to education. Through these programmes they have been able to keep children in school and at home, saving them from trafficking and probable harm. Where children or adults are exploited and abused, these organisations have confronted offenders and demanded fair payment or compensation, and better conditions. EKTA works closely with local government officials on protection issues and runs the Child Help Desk at the Madurai Railway Station. It has been able to return all but one trafficked child to his or her home. Groups like EKTA are key to stopping child labour and trafficking because they run training programmes in the community, actively promote the child helpline number, and push governments to implement safeguarding measures.

In Sri Lanka, the Women's Centre was set up to assist women working in factories in the newly established Free Trade Zones. Generations of young women from the countryside have found a warm welcome and support in its centres. Unable to form trade unions, it began by providing a gathering place, a library and medical services to working women. It continues to advocate for better wages and working conditions as well as improved living conditions and safer communities. The Women's Centre and our two other Sri Lankan partners campaign for fair pay and better conditions for workers employed in the Plantation sector, primarily tea pickers.

The National Garment Workers' Federation in Bangladesh has also been a very strong advocate for workers' rights. It has tirelessly supported some of the more than 4 million workers in the garment industry. Every year its members mark the anniversaries of the Rana Plaza collapse and the earlier Tazreen factory fire. The fight for fair compensation and safe factories is part of NGWF's many demands for the human rights of all workers.

CWS supports new legislation to stop modern slavery and promote decent working conditions because we know that our funding of these groups is not enough to stop the harm that such exploitation does. With global supply chains, there must be international brakes on slavery and exploitation. However, we are very aware that it is local groups who know best what is happening. For such legislation to be effective in preventing harm, it must draw on this knowledge and not rely on government or international

outsiders. Such action would help address the underlying causes of poverty that so often drive such exploitation.

CWS supports Strong Legislation that includes:

- Recognition of all human rights including the right to a living wage and workers' rights to organise.
- Acknowledgement that Aotearoa New Zealand is committed to stopping modern slavery and exploitation through a stepped process that involves informed people in country and not a costly external exercise.
- Training and protection measures to help businesses implement measures, recognising that there is a need for robust systems that can, where necessary, circumvent governments and avoid corruption.
- International and domestic businesses of all sizes being encouraged to review their supply chains in the first instance alongside the government putting in place measures to enforce compliance after a defined period.
- The New Zealand government designating some of the Aid vote into a special fund accessible to organisations like CWS and Unionaid carrying out the critical grassroots work of making sure children stay in school and that workers have access to good information on their human rights and government entitlements. This acknowledges that good development will also address the poverty issues that drive slavery and exploitation.
- The government actively supporting international measures to stop slavery and exploitation - especially through the ILO and UN. Action at this level could counter some of the economic harm caused by increasingly centralised international business.
- A more secure supply chain. CWS has supported Trade Aid and the importance of fair trade. Many of our supporters are loyal supporters of fair trade and local producers because they do not want others to be exploited.
- Acknowledgement of the unions and others who have knowledge and expertise on domestic conditions.
- Appropriate priority to the Crown's responsibilities to Māori under Te Tiriti O Waitangi.

Conclusion

CWS thanks the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment for the opportunity to support the development of appropriate legislation and is happy to contribute further information or answer questions.