

Combating trafficking in human beings: UK statement

Thank you, Special Representative Richie, for preparing this report.

Human trafficking affects every country in the world, whether as a country of origin, transit, or destination for victims. We must work together to stop this appalling trade in men, women and children, and stop traffickers acting with impunity.

We welcome the emphasis your Office has placed on improving prosecution rates in human trafficking cases. Earlier this year the UK recorded an annual increase of more than 50% in modern slavery offenses as more victims came forward.

But even though we are seeing an increase in the number of prosecutions brought and convictions secured, we acknowledge there is more to do. So we look forward to receiving your upcoming comprehensive account of the findings of the prosecution-focussed Alliance conference that will share effective ways in which we can ensure the prosecution and conviction of the perpetrators of human trafficking, so that their victims receive the justice they deserve.

We agree with your assessment that supported victims lead to stronger cases, and we were particularly struck by the survivor testimonies given at the Alliance conference earlier this year, which reminded us all of the courage shown by those who come forward and how important it is to protect these voices. In future, we look forward to receiving your guidance on the establishment of child trafficking focal points; as well as an overview of gender-sensitive approaches, so we may better address victims' specific protection needs.

We support your Office's work to eradicate trafficking from supply chains, to ensure that we all stop paying – inadvertently and unwittingly – for trafficking. We were pleased to have provided some funding to your Office last year to compile a compendium of ethical sourcing; as well as to develop model guidelines on measures to prevent trafficking for labour exploitation in supply chains.

Earlier this year, the UK became the first country to publish a government modern slavery statement, setting out how the UK Government is tackling modern slavery in its supply chains across £50 billion of annual spending. Individual ministerial departments will publish their modern slavery statements next year.

We recognise the increasingly influential role technology is playing in facilitating, but also in preventing, human trafficking; and we welcome your Office's commitment to this agenda and the upcoming guidance for governments to tackle misuse of technology. We are pleased to be able to support your

Office's new project on enhancing the response to the threat of technology-facilitated trafficking.

We echo your call to participating States to show the political will to address comprehensively this important issue. We hope that those OSCE participating States who have not yet done so will sign up to the Modern Slavery Call to Action, which sets out the practical steps that countries need to take to respond effectively to modern slavery, and demonstrates our collective intent that we will not tolerate this in our societies.

We are pleased to take part in your Office's follow-up survey to obtain updated information on implementation by the States of the existing, impressive body of OSCE anti-trafficking commitments. We support this stocktaking approach, which will be particularly useful in identifying areas requiring more intense focus from States and spotting particular trends or challenges in the OSCE region. We hope this work, and the expertise of your Office, will guide thinking on possible new Ministerial Council decisions, focusing on where the gaps in our existing commitments are, and where the OSCE has a clear role to play.

Once again can I offer my appreciation for the work you and your team have done over the past year. We look forward to continuing to work together on this important issue in 2021 and beyond.

Thank you.