

News story: Victoria Atkins chairs business against slavery forum today

Victoria Atkins met with some of the most influential business leaders in the UK, including chief executives from Aviva, Co-op, Associated British Foods, BT and Sky, who joined with government representatives at the business against slavery forum to discuss what more can be done to accelerate progress in tackling modern slavery.

Speaking after the forum, Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

This government is proud to lead the world in ending this terrible injustice through the Modern Slavery Act and an advanced law enforcement response. However we know that, hidden from view in the supply chains that produce the goods and services we consume, there is an underbelly of forced labour that we must eradicate.

The companies here today are leading the way by taking robust action to prevent slavery in their supply chains, but other businesses have failed to fulfil their legal obligations or have published weak statements which are lacking in detail.

All businesses need to step up and help eliminate slavery. My department will be writing directly to the CEOs of businesses which continue to flout their legal obligations – and if this persists they can expect to face tougher consequences.

Under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, it is a legal requirement for companies with a £36 million turnover to publish a transparency statement and explain what they are doing to stop modern slavery occurring.

During the business against slavery forum, a number of company-led initiatives were discussed, such as Co-op's bright future programme, giving survivors a pathway to paid employment, and HSBC's survivor bank accounts.

The meeting included some of the largest companies in the UK which collectively employ over 800,000 people with a combined turnover of more than £140 billion a year. The forum was launched last year in partnership with the government to enforce greater transparency in supply chains. It is attended by Aviva, Co-op, Associated British Foods, BT, Sky, Hewlett Packard, WPP, Barclays and HSBC.

The Modern Slavery Act was introduced in 2015, the first piece legislation of its kind in the world, transforming our response to modern slavery, both in the UK and internationally. Last year, there were over 600 police investigations – 3 times higher than 2015 – with thousands of potential victims identified.