

Speech: PM speech at McCain Institute

Awards: 09 October 2018

Thank you Cindy. It's wonderful to be able to be here tonight.

I want to start by remembering the late Senator John McCain – a man whose whole life embodied the calling of service over self...

...who profoundly believed we have so much more in common with each other than in disagreement...

...and whose faith in our common humanity led him to speak out against the barbaric inhumanity of modern slavery.

Senator McCain was a true statesman – and I am proud to say, a great friend of our United Kingdom.

And I am deeply honoured to receive this award in his name this evening.

I also want to pay tribute to Cindy for your own long-standing work helping victims of modern slavery and helping to raise the profile of this terrible, abhorrent crime around the world.

Cindy – thank you for your inspirational leadership.

And let me also thank Vice President Biden and everyone here this evening who is supporting the work of the McCain Institute in fighting this absolutely hideous and hidden trade in humans.

As Senator McCain said – it is our duty to stop the victimization of all men, women and children.

And in honouring that duty tonight we are together taking on – what I believe is – the great human rights issue of our time.

One of the first victims of modern slavery I met, was a woman who had been taken as a child from Uganda and enslaved by a family in London.

Someone came to her village and promised her mother they could offer a better life.

The girl had never left the village before but she was put on a plane and she was brought here where she was taken into domestic servitude.

She was raped by the man of the house – and by his friends.

Then after several years, the family moved away and just left her abandoned on the streets of London.

I thought when I heard that story how can anybody treat another human being like that?

How can anybody think they can put another human being through that pain and suffering – and just use them as an object?

And how can these sorts of horrors be happening here in my country, now, in this century?

Yet today there are more than 40 million men, women and children suffering in modern slavery across the world, with between 10,000 and 13,000 in the UK alone.

That is why – first as Home Secretary and now as Prime Minister – I made tackling modern slavery a personal mission.

And it is why I want to work with you – and with partners all around the world – so that together we can say: we will not tolerate these crimes in our societies any longer.

We have made progress.

Here in the UK – a Modern Slavery Act, the first of its kind in the world, has created new powers to bring perpetrators to justice, with life sentences for the worst offenders.

Just last week we saw a drug dealer – who used three children from Birmingham to sell crack cocaine and heroin – jailed for 14 years after admitting charges of modern slavery.

We have new protections and support for victims – with more than a ten-fold increase in the number of potential victims being referred compared with a decade ago.

We have a world leading transparency requirement on business to eradicate modern slavery, including from their supply chains.

And as Prime Minister, I have established the first ever Taskforce on Modern Slavery to drive forward a coherent strategy across all departments and agencies.

But modern slavery is a global problem, it respects neither borders nor jurisdictions, and it requires a global response.

So the UK successfully advocated for eradicating modern slavery to be included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We have increased our international development spending on fighting modern slavery and child exploitation from £75m to over £200m.

And at the United Nations last year we launched a Global Call to Action which has now been endorsed by more than 80 countries.

But there is more to do.

The organised criminals who perpetrate these abhorrent crimes are becoming

ever more sophisticated in the methods they use.

And we must adapt as rapidly as the criminals we are working to stop.

In the UK, we have an independent review of our Modern Slavery Act which will strengthen it wherever needed to respond to the threat as it evolves.

And next week we will be launching the second round of our Modern Slavery Innovation Fund – with another £5 million to build the evidence base around new approaches to tackle modern slavery internationally.

But to be successful we must continue to raise awareness of these horrific crimes so everyone can play their part in exposing them.

So I welcome the brilliant work of organisations like the McCain Institute – from helping taxi drivers and airline pilots recognise the signs of modern slavery, to your pioneering initiative to raise awareness on our university campuses.

Ultimately, nothing is more powerful in raising that awareness than the stories of survivors.

It is the courage of survivors to speak out about these crimes that has made so much of our work possible.

It is when they speak out that we can expose their captors.

It is when they speak out that others suffering in the shadows can be found.

And it is when they speak out that the conscience of the world is roused to this great injustice.

So it is to the bravery of those survivors that I dedicate this award.

And to their hope for a better future that, together, we must reaffirm our resolve to end these abhorrent crimes and rid the world of this barbaric evil once and for all.

Thank you.