

Speech: Working together to end modern slavery

I am delighted to be here today at the launch of RUSI's new report into the role financial institutions can play in tackling modern slavery.

Events like these are so important because however hard we might try – slavery is not something that the government can tackle alone.

We need all of you in this room to collaborate – bringing your tools, expertise and knowledge together to combat what the Prime Minister has rightly called 'the greatest human rights issue of our time'.

And I want to start today by telling you a story about a young woman – I'm going to call her J.

J was a bright girl who came to the UK to study from Asia. She met a woman from her own community at a local temple who encouraged her to come to the cafe she owned to speak to customers to practice her English.

At first it went well. J spent time at the cafe and her English improved.

But slowly the cafe owner began to demand more and more and became abusive towards J.

She found herself totally trapped and forced to work for 14 hours a day, with limited toilet breaks, no heating and no food or drink at all during working hours.

Life became intolerable. She lost contact with friends and was kicked out of college because she wasn't turning up anymore because she was always manning the cafe.

She was too scared to go to the police because her captor threatened her and her family and her health deteriorated.

But in 2014, supported by a British Transport Police officer, J escaped and was referred to the Salvation Army who placed her in a safe house which helped her to rebuild her life.

And when I met J in the summer, it was clear that although she had been controlled, degraded and mistreated, a much better future was now in sight for her.

J's story is a reminder to all of us that slavery is not consigned to history. It is happening here and it is happening now.

200 years ago Britain abolished the slave trade and the British Navy set out to eradicate slavery overseas. And yet there are currently 10-13,000 people enslaved in Britain and an estimated 45.8 million victims of modern slavery

worldwide.

But as Home Secretary I am determined to do all I can to protect and support victims of this horrible crime and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

In 2015 the government introduced the world-leading Modern Slavery Act. We gave law enforcement agencies new powers to tackle modern slavery, we introduced maximum life sentences for perpetrators and we enhanced the protections available for victims.

Introducing the act sent a clear message that the UK will not tolerate this terrible crime.

We also introduced the ground-breaking transparency in supply chain provision, requiring large businesses to set out the steps they have taken in the last 12 months to ensure there is no modern slavery in their business or in their supply chains. Since these statements became compulsory, thousands of businesses have published them. Other countries now look to our work in this area as the gold standard.

But just because we have legislation in place does not mean that the problem is solved. That's why the Prime Minister personally chairs the first ever modern slavery taskforce with every relevant department attending, to keep a grip on the issue and drive forward our operational response. This is a priority for her as it is for the government.

And we are seeing the results of our efforts. More victims of modern slavery are being rescued and supported and more perpetrators are being brought to justice. There were 113 convictions in 2015 and we expect more convictions under the Modern Slavery Act this year.

At the end of January, 2 brothers who trafficked 18 people from Poland to the UK and conned and threatened them were jailed for 6 years after being prosecuted for offences under the Modern Slavery Act.

They had forced the vulnerable men to work at the Sports Direct warehouse in Shirebrook in Derbyshire and they had controlled their bank accounts and kept most of their wages.

These men had hoped for a new life in Britain but the reality was squalid living conditions and near total control by their captors.

These men came from Poland but were trafficked to Britain, a reminder that modern slavery spans countries and borders and we need to have an international and not just a national approach.

And I am proud that we are leading work to develop a global response to slavery and that this is one of our top foreign priorities.

We need to make sure that we are working collaboratively with law enforcement agencies around the world to stop gangs that operate across borders and across jurisdictions.

And we have committed to investing £33.5 million of overseas aid funding to tackle the root causes of modern slavery.

We will focus on those high-risk countries where we know victims are regularly trafficked to the UK. And as I announced in October, £11 million of this money is for our dedicated Modern Slavery Innovation Fund used to support, trial and test new innovative ways of tackling modern slavery overseas.

And today I am very pleased to announce that we will be spending £6 million from this £11 million fund on 10 new projects. These projects will support victims directly, tackle slavery in supply chains and help to share skills and expertise with overseas partners.

Working with NGOs, academics and international organisations, the projects will test a range of activities to build up evidence of what works in addressing modern slavery.

So let me tell you about some of these projects.

We will be investing over £1 million in UN University, the research and academic arm of the UN. Funding will allow them to gather together modern slavery data from around the world and encourage its use by researchers and policy makers.

UN University will accelerate and coordinate the global exchange of data and research on modern slavery and will therefore improve the work done to tackle modern slavery right across the globe.

We will also be giving funding of over £140,000 to St Mary's University to support research into the role of organised criminals in modern slavery. Looking at a number of countries and known trafficking routes, they will provide valuable insights into the networks that transport vulnerable people from overseas into the UK to be exploited.

And we will work with GoodWeave, an NGO transforming the South Asian rug sector with its work to end illegal child labour in manufacturing. GoodWeave has done excellent work with exporters and importers to ensure their supply chains are free from child labour. Our funding will allow them to expand this work to other sectors in India which are known to be at high risk from modern slavery.

We want to make sure that the impact of this work is carefully assessed and we will commission a full review to examine the results.

But as the RUSI paper published today sets out, human trafficking and other forms of slavery continue to exist because they are profitable business models which are seen as relatively low risk by criminal groups. The International Labour Organisation estimates that the trade in human beings generates an enormous \$150 billion of profit a year for instance.

So if it's the money that's the incentive, then it's the money that we need to follow to really get to grips with the scourge of modern day slavery.

Indeed, following the money trail is a highly effective technique to attack organised crime.

And law enforcement agencies and the financial sector both hold information which is of great value to one another. By sharing this, law enforcement agencies can get vital intelligence to pursue the traffickers; and the banks can better understand the 'red flags' they need to look out for which could identify modern slavery, and better protect themselves.

In 2015 we launched the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce which is the mechanism that allows for this information sharing and I am very glad that so many of you here today are involved with this.

This is an example of public-private sector collaboration at its very best and we've already seen some great results.

In the last 18 months, the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce has provided tactical intelligence to law enforcement agencies on 21 human trafficking and modern slavery cases; work that has already supported a number of arrests and prosecutions.

The Criminal Finances Bill will make this taskforce even more effective, giving new protections to enable bank-to-bank information sharing as well as new powers for law enforcement to investigate the money laundering linked to modern slavery and to confiscate the proceeds of crime.

And I hope that banks will continue to support the strengthened partnership working that the taskforce has helped build and the more targeted intelligence that it is generating.

But as the RUSI paper explains, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for financial institutions in disrupting human trafficking and modern slavery.

All businesses and all banks need to ask themselves – what does modern slavery mean for us? What are we doing to prevent it?

In the audience we have representatives from the financial sector, the NCA and wider law enforcement and I want to see you all working together to combat modern slavery.

And I want to see you sharing best practice. Financial institutions are often global and those of you based in the UK can play an important role promoting best practice and encouraging partner institutions to take a similar path to your own in overseas branches.

And I want to see you all implementing due diligence – ask the questions – who are my customers? What are they up to?

And if you're a business which buys goods and services, are you taking ambitious steps to ensure your own supply chains are slavery free and are you producing detailed and thorough transparency in supply chains statements?

If you're an investor – are you asking to see the transparency in supply

chains statements of businesses before you invest in them? Are you considering that modern slavery is a potential business risk and calling for the businesses which you invest in to do more to address that risk?

And if you're a lender, what due diligence are you undertaking to ensure that your money will not be used to support projects involving modern slavery?

By doing all of this, you will not only manage your own company's financial, legal and reputational risks more effectively, you will also be significantly contributing to our collective efforts to end modern slavery in the UK and globally.

Tackling modern slavery is not and will not be easy, but we have a moral imperative to do all that we can.

Two centuries ago, it was a team effort to get slavery on English soil banned. Parliamentarians, women, slave revolt leaders and Quakers all played their part. And in 2017, tackling modern slavery still needs to be a group endeavour.

The more of us involved in the fight to stop the traffickers and the slave drivers, the more winnable the battle becomes.