

**UK STATEMENT - UNTOC WORKING GROUP ON TRAFFICKING IN
PERSONS, 12 OCTOBER 2021**

Thank you for giving me the floor Chair,

On behalf of the United Kingdom, I would like to thank you and the UNODC as the Secretariat of the UNTOC and its Protocols thereto for facilitating the UNTOC Working Group on Trafficking in Persons. The UK attaches great importance to this forum and to strengthening and leveraging public procurement to address modern slavery and trafficking in public sector supply chains. We would like to thank the panellists for their interventions.

Chair,

Victims can face the most serious forms of exploitation, suffering physical and psychological abuse, having their fundamental rights suppressed and working for little to no pay.

Since 2015, the UK has required large businesses in the UK to produce annual modern slavery statements on the steps they have taken to tackle modern slavery in their operations and supply chains.

This transparency legislation has driven a change in business culture, spotlighting modern slavery risks on boardroom agendas and within the international human rights community.

But over the last few years, businesses have turned around and asked Government what it is doing to prevent modern slavery in our own supply chains.

This is a fair challenge. The UK public sector spends around £290bn a year on goods and services. We largely procure from the private sector and are exposed to the same risks.

Over the last few years, we have undertaken a wide series of measures to create a strategic cross-government approach that has senior-level buy-in, to provide government commercial staff the tools they need to address forced labour in supply chains, and to report transparently to the public on the steps we are taking.

We have recently created a director-level 'anti-slavery advocates network across central government'. In practice, this means each ministerial department has a named senior official to oversee how they are tackling modern slavery and enhance collaboration across government. We have a working group that supports this network and helps inform the approach we take with our suppliers.

For example, this working group has informed how Government can deliver greater social value through its commercial activities and incentivise businesses to become more responsible and sustainable. We have launched the Social Value Model, which requires most new central government procurements to take account of social value criteria in the award of contracts, including placing a minimum weighting of 10% of the total score on social value, to ensure that social value carries a significant enough score to be a differentiating factor in bid evaluation.

Chair,

The UK has launched a range of resources to support commercial and procurement staff across government take practical steps. Examples include:

1. The publishing of a Policy Procurement Note and guidance setting out the steps government departments should take throughout the commercial lifecycle to identify and mitigate modern slavery risks.

2. The launch of a the modern slavery assessment tool, which public bodies can use with their suppliers to understand what anti-slavery practices they have in place and provide suppliers with tailored recommendations on how to improve. Over 3,000 businesses have completed this assessment.
3. In July 2021 we launched a 2.5 hours e-learning course for public sector commercial staff. The e-learning was developed in collaboration with experts and helps learners spot modern slavery risks in procurement and critically interrogate the assurances suppliers provide (such as social audits).

We are also being transparent about the steps we are taking so the public can hold us to account and ensure we are taking meaningful steps to prevent exploitation in government supply chains.

In March 2020, we published the world's first government modern slavery statement which set out how central government is working with our suppliers to identify and prevent exploitation in government supply chains.

This year, each ministerial department will publish their first annual modern slavery statements, providing greater detail and transparency of the steps individual departments are taking.

We plan to extend the Modern Slavery Act's reporting requirement to a wide range of public bodies with a budget of £36 million or more, such as local authorities, health agencies and police forces.

Chair,

It's really positive that there is so much more momentum globally for public bodies and multilateral institutions to strengthen their approach to preventing exploitation in their supply chains.

Internationally, the UK welcomes ICAT and the UN Procurement Task Force's thematic focus in recent years on measures to prevent trafficking in persons in supply chains, including in public procurement, as well as in the procurement of goods and services by the United Nations.

We were pleased to fund the development of a [strategic mapping exercise of the ICAT memberships](#)' mandates, priorities, programmes and partnerships and believe that this will be a valuable tool for Member States who may wish to inform themselves of international resources available to them. We're pleased that ICAT developed the policy brief [Preventing Trafficking in Persons: The Role of Procurement](#)' and look forward to hearing how it has been disseminated and used by international actors.

The UK was also pleased to support language within this year's CCPCJ resolution on Trafficking in Persons which *requests the relevant agencies of the United Nations system to ensure that United Nations procurement is free from trafficking in persons*. We would be interested in hearing about the progress the UN has made implementing this resolution.

The UK will also use the ongoing UNTOC Review Mechanism and our self-assessments to report on some of our national practices aimed at strengthening public procurement practices. We believe that this will also serve as a valuable vehicle for helping States Parties to identify and address any gaps and challenges in their domestic legislation.

Finally, I would like to express to you Chair that we have circulated some recommendations to the Secretariat based upon our intervention today. I would be grateful if these could be included in the draft report of the working group, so that they can be considered by States Parties.

Thank you.

Item 2 'Measures to strengthen procurement policies at the national, regional and international levels'

Recommendations

1. States Parties should work with public bodies and multilateral institutions to take a strategic risk-based approach to mitigating modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) risks in their supply chain.
2. Public bodies and multilateral institutions should explore how they can use public procurement to create incentives for the private sector to become more responsible and sustainable.
3. Public bodies and multilateral institutions to build capacity of their staff and provide them with the tools they need to identify and mitigate MSHT risks in their supply chains.
4. States Parties should encourage public bodies and multilateral institutions, to produce transparency statements which require senior management approval, so that they are held accountable for the steps they have taken to address MSHT risks in their supply chains.