



During the forum the Archbishop and the Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, issued a joint declaration on modern slavery.

Your All Holiness, Beloved Brother in Christ.

I thank you most warmly for your generous welcome and for the wisdom with which you have framed the question before us today.

When we last met at Lambeth Palace in November 2015, following our meeting in January 2014, you will remember that we reflected and prayed together on the many situations of severe crisis affecting millions of people's lives across the world. In light of these conversations, we agreed to jointly organise an international conference on overcoming modern slavery and human trafficking.

It is a great privilege to return to this historic city and to see our hopes realised. I am deeply grateful to Your All Holiness and to all those in your office for working tirelessly, often against a difficult political backdrop, to bring this conference to fruition. Given the recent and appalling terrorist attacks here in Turkey, I am also deeply touched that so many distinguished guests have rightly accepted your gracious invitation.

Seeing the evil before our eyes

Your All Holiness, Excellences, distinguished guests - despite the best efforts of nineteenth century abolitionists like William Wilberforce, slavery - one of the most extreme forms of injustice - is more rampant today than at any time in human history.

Estimates by the International Labour Organisation and the Global Slavery Index respectively suggest that between 20.9 and 45.8 million lives globally are demeaned by this abhorrent practice.

These are truly overwhelming numbers.

Numbers this big are sometimes hard to comprehend. But, when one thinks that Spain has a population of 46 million you begin to get an idea of the magnitude of the problem.

We should never forget that these statistics consist of individuals lovingly created in the image and likeness of God the Father, each of them, with us, co-heirs to the Kingdom of God, made possible through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. They represent someone's mother, father, son, daughter, brother and sister.

That is why slavery is such an abomination and affront to human dignity and why Pope Francis is right to call it a crime against humanity. We all owe Pope Francis a huge debt of gratitude for the work he has done in drawing attention to this sin and for his efforts, through the Santa Marta Group, to eradicate it.

Slavery is all around us, but we are too blind to see it. It is in our hands, and yet we are too insensitive to touch it. The enslaved are next to us in the streets, but we are too ignorant to walk alongside them. It must not be relegated to a footnote in history. It is still a living reality in all of our communities, as I have seen from personal experience in the United Kingdom, not because we think it is acceptable, but because our sin lies in blindness and ignorance.

It is foolish to think of slavery as a non-western problem. 58% of those living in slavery might come from 5 countries - India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan - but it is also prevalent in Europe. In the United Kingdom there are nearly 12,000 slaves.

Nor should we think that the high prevalence of slavery in Asia - where three quarters of the global number of slaves are held - is just an Asian problem. In Asia slavery provides the low skilled and low cost labour that produces consumer goods for Western markets. As consumers and investors we have little way of knowing whether businesses are using slave labour for the products we buy. There is a responsibility on the shoulders of investors in particular to put in place the most rigorous of checks to ensure that the supply chains of those companies in which they invest are slavery-free. And Governments, encouraged by their electorates, must be courageous in prioritising legislation that promotes such action. The requirement in the UK Modern Slavery Act, driven in large part by the passion for this subject of our Prime Minister when she was Home Secretary, for companies to report on their supply chains, is leadership that must be both admired and replicated around the world.

William Wilberforce convinced his generation that slavery was a sin. That belief has not changed. The sin lies in our ignorance to its existence around us.

With this in mind I am delighted that last year the Church of England set up the Clewer Initiative against Modern Day Slavery. Drawing on the excellent work and leadership of the Bishop of Derby this Initiative aims to help dioceses detect instances of modern day slavery and to provide care to its victims. I have high hopes that this initiative will galvanise the Church into further action so that it might better serve as a witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Understanding the drivers of modern day slavery

Slavery today takes many forms and encompasses a variety of situations, including women forced into prostitution, children and adults forced to work in agriculture, domestic work, or factories and sweatshops producing goods for global supply chains, even entire families forced to work for nothing to pay off generational debts or girls forced to marry older men.

The forms of slavery may differ but they share the same essential characteristics - the coercive exploitation of the most vulnerable. People are enslaved through unpaid wages, withheld passports, physical violence, fraudulent contracts and un-repayable debt.

The tragedy of slavery is that it is a human condition of our own making. It is driven by human greed and those that would make a profit from excessively cheap labour.

Slavery persists for no other reason than it is highly profitable. It is one of the most profitable international criminal industries. It feeds on human vulnerability. The majority of those who find themselves enslaved come from marginalised and impoverished communities.

Slavery never occurs in isolation. It takes place when the rule of law fails and when those that are vulnerable to human exploitation are offered no protection. It is nourished by chaos, conflict and natural disasters - all of which have been sadly on the rise in recent years.

How can we forget the deliberate targeting of women and girls in Iraq by Daesh and in Nigeria by Boko Haram and the way they have been used as objects to be sold or gifted for free? We need to hold them in our prayers and work tirelessly for their liberation.

But, let me speak clearly here - there is no religious basis or justification for a practice that commodifies human beings. All religious leaders need to speak out against such a practice and challenge those false prophets that seek to corrupt sacred texts to justify their warped behaviour.

Last year, the number of displaced people exceeded 60 million.

Again, this is a truly shocking statistic. Many, as in Iraq and Syria, are fleeing from persecution, destruction and death. The scale of today's migration has become a natural feeding ground for slave masters and human traffickers.

All too easily, human smuggling can turn into human trafficking. Migrants on the move are being approached by strangers with offers of work or marriage. Some are being offered money for organs and body parts.

It is heart wrenching to think that thousands that escaped the horrors of Daesh have had their hopes for a better future wrecked on Europe's shores by the evil intentions of those that profit from such an odious trade.

As many as 10,000 children registered as refugees are now unaccounted, with 5,000 missing in Italy and 1,000 in Sweden. This is an unacceptable and shameful state of affairs which governments and relevant UN bodies must respond to as a matter of urgency.

The need for well managed migration in times of emergency

Our responses to humanitarian emergencies and mass migration must take account of the very real risks of modern slavery on highly vulnerable migrant and refugee populations. We must challenge the response of those that would simply have us pull up the draw-bridge.

I admire the work that the IOCC - the International Orthodox Christian Charities - is doing across the Middle East and Southern Europe to address the vulnerability of refugee populations fleeing conflict. Similarly impressive work is being done by Anglican chaplaincies along the Mediterranean coastline and across the Diocese in Europe.

Time and again when I travel to the differing parts of the Anglican Communion, many of which are in conflict or just coming out of one, I am reminded that the Church, like no other organisation, is there before, during and after a conflict.

Churches in these situations find themselves in the front line in the battle against modern day slavery. The destruction of the rule of law that comes with war, as well as the destruction of infrastructure, schools, health care increases the vulnerability to slavery. Those at risk often turn to the Church for help.

We need to look at ways of strengthening the capacity of Churches in conflict and fragile states to provide compassionate and loving service to those at risk. We need to resource them to identify the tell-tale signs of slavery and to support them challenge the stigma that many survivors experience.

On the question of stigma, we need to shift established mindsets. All too often, the victims of slavery, whether in Europe or further afield, are treated like criminals, when in fact the focus should be on their rehabilitation and reintegration.

As you will hear during this conference, the Anglican Alliance for Relief, Development and Advocacy is doing some much needed work around the Anglican Communion hosting workshops and training sessions for clergy. This is important and necessary work if we are to challenge the specific context within which slavery is embedded and perpetuated.

Challenging established practices that normalise slavery is sometimes best done by churches that understand the local context. Our local presence can help make slavery visible to those people that are most affected by it. We can speak to people in a way that they understand and can relate to.

We need to strengthen these efforts, but also to encourage them to use the evidence at their disposal to advocate for effective modern day slavery laws. The ground-breaking UK Modern Day Slavery Act 2015 provides a helpful template. If we are to eradicate modern slavery then our efforts need to move beyond simply disrupting the flows of slavery to addressing the inequality or weak rule of law in source countries. This will be done alongside serious efforts to make supply chains slavery-free, bringing major investors alongside the work so that success in supply chains can have far-reaching impact, and making it easier to report slavery by making it more visible. All of these responses require education and cooperation. Both are possible and we should take the opportunity of so much national and global focus on this issue to make real inroads.

A way forward

Your All Holiness, distinguished guests, modern-day slavery is receiving unprecedented global attention. That is welcomed.

It is one of the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals which were agreed in August 2015. Businesses are increasingly aware of the risks of slavery in their supply chains. Funding for anti-slavery work is increasing. New alliances are being formed.

We find ourselves at a moment of great potential. And we must not turn away from the opportunity, but rather commit to concrete actions that will demonstrably lead people out of slavery and into freedom.

The first action is alliance-building. As Your All Holiness has demonstrated with great success in the field of environmental issues, it is when we bring together diverse and sometimes surprising coalitions that we see lasting change. To tackle modern slavery, we must do the same. Each of us here can commit to widening the network of institutions – public, private, voluntary – that together can develop an increasingly sophisticated, compassionate and targeted response.

The second action is to change structures and inspire our flocks. As religious leaders, we need to ensure that our words and commitments lead to action within our own churches. This comes through education – through seminaries and theological colleges – but also in how we present the issue in our parishes, even our liturgy. For the Church of England, it means using our investment portfolio to challenge companies not only to better recognise and remove slavery from their supply chains, but to themselves put pressure on their competitors to respond.

The third action is prayer. We need to find space in the calendar when we can come together as a global family of churches to observe in prayer and action our commitment to end slavery in our life time. In Britain, churches have set aside the Sunday nearest to Anti-Slavery day on the 18 October as Freedom Sunday to encourage worship and action against slavery. It would be wonderful if other churches around the world would join this movement.

In Christian theology, we talk a lot about how Jesus Christ came ‘to proclaim freedom for the prisoners’ and ‘to set the oppressed free’. Today, we are called to break the very real chains of slavery that deny people their freedom to live life in all its fullness. Those who have taken this freedom will be judged by God, and those who neglect to resist such sin cannot escape his judgement.

But God is also Redeemer.

He will bring healing to the liberated – which requires us to walk alongside those released from bondage.

He redeems his Church – empowering it to overcome the historic justification of slavery – to be his hand of mercy to a suffering world.

And He opens our eyes and ears, so that we might see as he sees, hear as he hears – people not to be bought and sold, but each precious in his sight, worthy of our love and care.

Let it be, in the grace of God, that our deliberations are more than talk, but begin the process of liberation for those for whom we demonstrate that Love Divine.

[Read more: Archbishop joins Ecumenical Patriarch to fight modern slavery](#)

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/archbishop-canterburys-speech-istanbul-forum-modern-slavery>