

Committee: Human Rights Council

Topics: Modern slavery in a globalized world

Chairs: Alexandra Hui



Shenzhen College of International Education
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Letter from the Chairs

Dear delegates,

It is my greatest pleasure to welcome you to the Human Rights Council, the United Nations body dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. My name is Alexandra Hui, a junior at Li Po Chun United World College, and I am honored to serve as your chair for SCIEMUN 2023. Since the beginning of my MUN journey in 2020, I have accumulated both delegating and chairing experience over the course of almost four years. I would like to share this passion of mine with all of you through this conference, which I hope will be a memorable and enjoyable experience.

This year in HRC, we will address fundamental yet crucial elements that constitute both international and universal human rights, such as individual freedom and access to public goods and services. During research, you may come across some concepts that seem to be too broad and intangible, which I fully understand, and am always here to provide help if needed, so please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or concerns. I wish you all the best of luck and look forward to seeing you all on the 3rd of November!

Best regards,

Alexandra Hui

Committee Background and Mission Statement

The Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system mandated to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and to address gross or systematic situations of human rights violations and make recommendations. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. Created by the General Assembly by its resolution 60/251, the official Human Rights Council replaced the Commission on Human Rights on 15 March 2006. Since the council's first session from 19 to 30 June

2006, a number of significant documents have been drafted and adopted by the council, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Today, the council continues to tackle emerging human rights issues, enforce existing policies, and encourage greater awareness and protection of human rights on an international level.

Topic Overview

Introduction

The term slavery is typically associated, in historical context, with the past. In particular, chattel slavery in the period 16th to 18th century. Furthermore, historical events such as the 1863 emancipation of slaves in the United States tend to characterize slavery as a feature of history and not of modern society. However, the fact that slavery persists, in contemporary forms, in our society today is often obscured or neglected. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO)'s Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, in 2022, 49.6 million people lived in modern slavery in the year 2021 alone. In sharp contrast to the common misconception, the number of victims of modern slavery displayed a significantly rising trend in the last five years.

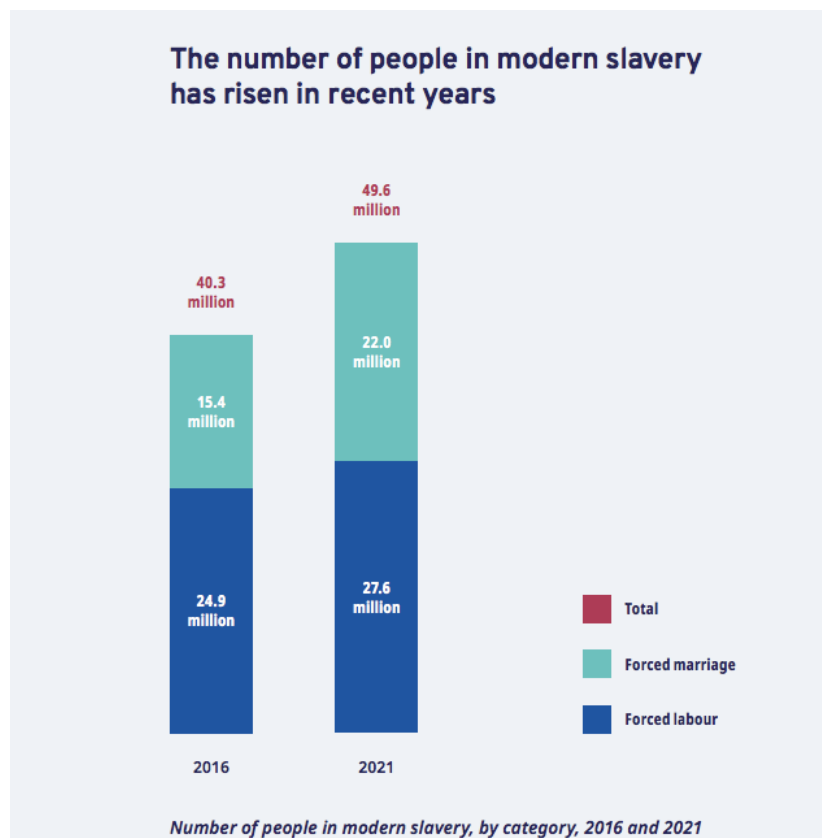


Figure 1: Number of people in modern slavery, by category, 2016 and 2021 (ILO, 2022)

Most commonly interpreted as a result of poverty, social exclusion, and lack of opportunities, modern slavery varies in form and manifestation. However, its occurrence is similar and most strikingly marked by signs indicating exploitation and coercion, such as degrading conditions, exhausting working hours, debt bondage, forced labor, or restriction of freedom/movement. Marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as migrant workers, refugees, women, and children are likely victims of modern slavery. It is difficult for victims to voice themselves, not only because of threats from employers but also lack of awareness, for labor exploitation is often hidden in global supply chains and overshadowed by emphasis on growth and GDP.

The problem with modern slavery lies not only within its nature, which violates individual freedoms and autonomy but also the threat it poses to social justice and sustainable development. With this said, the association of modern slavery with the violation of human rights should be evident. It is important for delegates to keep in mind during debate that the concept of consent does not apply to discussions of modern slavery. Individuals cannot give consent to exploitation, which may vary in extent but is never subject to agreement from the victim. Therefore, the council should focus on combating and reducing the phenomena of exploitation through the establishment of measures and procedures.

Definition of key terms

Modern slavery

Situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power, are used interchangeably for the purpose of this conference with contemporary slavery. Used as an umbrella term to refer to various forms of exploitation and coercive treatment (see below).

Chattel slavery

Situations where the enslaved person is considered the personal property (chattel) of someone else, and can usually be bought and sold, used interchangeably for the purpose of this conference with traditional slavery.

Forced labor

All work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily refers to work that is undertaken both under the threat of any penalty and is involuntary (ILO Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No.29))

Sex Trafficking

When an adult engages in a commercial sex act, such as prostitution, as the result of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion, or any combination of such means, that person is a victim of trafficking. Under such circumstances, perpetrators involved in recruiting, harboring, enticing, transporting, providing, obtaining, patronizing, soliciting, or maintaining a person for that purpose are guilty of sex trafficking of an adult.

Debt Bondage

Status or condition where one person has pledged their labor or services (or that of someone under their control), in circumstances where the fair value of that labor or service is not reasonably applied to reducing the debt or length of debt, or the length and nature of the service is not limited or defined.

Domestic Servitude

A form of human trafficking in which a domestic worker is not free to leave his or her employment and is abused and underpaid if paid at all. Further characterized by a lack of basic benefits and protections commonly extended to other groups of workers.

Worst forms of Child Labor

Situations where children are: exploited through slavery or slavery-like practices, including forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; used, procured, or offered for prostitution; used, procured, or offered for illicit activities including production and trafficking of drugs; engaged in hazardous work which may harm their health, safety or morals.

Globalization

The growth in the international exchange of information, goods, services, capital, and population, and the increasing levels of integration that characterize economic activity.

History and Current Situation

On the 10th of December, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations, with Article 4 stating that ‘No one shall be held in slavery or servitude: slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms’. Despite the existence of such legal actions taken decades ago,

slavery as an institution has not been eradicated. The emergence of new forms of exploitation has evolved into one of the most complex and challenging crises in our world today.

The origin of modern slavery takes root in the historical slave trade, it can be interpreted as the aftermath of the abolition of traditional forms of slavery in the 19th century, marked by the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act. Following this, the 19th century saw the persistence of coercive practices, which later on evolved into modern slavery in the forms we are familiar with today.

The 20th century, a period that saw great economic, social, and political changes and uncertainty, was characterized by a greater prevalence of modern slavery. It should be noted that global events such as conflicts and wars, pandemics, and climate change often result in increased vulnerability of groups and individuals to exploitation. During this time, the issue of human trafficking began to attract global attention, bringing forward measures such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Previous to the 21st century, there has been an evident lack of systematic and international efforts taken to resolve the issue. While the 2000s saw a considerable increase in awareness and the onset of domestic policies and legislation formation, modern slavery remains a subtopic under the greater phenomenon of trafficking, thus receiving limited attention.

In recent decades, sources of anti-slavery efforts have increased in both number and diversity. Multinational organizations, non-governmental organizations, private initiatives, and government-sponsored campaigns began to emerge, promoting awareness and fundraising. This includes efforts from NGO and civil society groups, such as Anti-Slavery International and End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT).

Nowadays, modern slavery remains hidden in global supply chains, infesting numerous aspects of modern consumption. This includes the clothing, cosmetics, seafood, drugs, and sexual industries. Even more implicit forms include forced begging and entertainment performances. Therefore, the existing need for practical and pragmatic policy-making and international efforts must also be recognized.

Date	Events
28 August 1833	Slavery Abolition Act in the British Empire
18 December 1865	Adoption of the 13 th amendment abolished slavery in the United States

10 December 1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations asserts the prohibition of slavery and slave trade in all their forms
28 October 2000	The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 passed by the U.S. Congress
12 December 2000	Signing of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Trafficking Protocol)
2001	First annual Trafficking in Persons Report (or TIP report) issued by the US State Department
2002	The Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime
2007	United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Trafficking (UN.GIFT) launched
September 2013	three anti-slavery donors, the Legatum Foundation, Humanity United and the Walk Free Foundation founded the Freedom Fund
26 March 2015	Modern Slavery Act passed in the United Kingdom

Focus questions

How can modern slavery be more easily identified and eliminated?

Fundamentally, the elimination of modern slavery requires an effective system of identification and punishment. Delegates should approach this question with their nation's economic interests, technological development, criminal justice system, resource adequacy, and in some cases, culture, in mind. (Possible solutions are provided below, combine with bloc positions to form a stance and proposal.)

What implications does anti-slavery measures have on domestic markets and local economy?

It would be sensible for low-cost labor-reliant countries to take into account the potential disruptions anti-slavery measures could bring to the local market and supply chains, as well as the increased labor costs. However, long-term benefits such as human capital development, ethical consumerism, and sustainable economic growth also stand as incentives for developing nations to adopt anti-slavery and forced labor policies.

What implications does anti-slavery measures have on international markets and global economy?

While elimination of exploitative measures in industries may appear to be the most direct solution, the interconnected and interdependent nature of global production chains must be recognized simultaneously. The affordability of commodities in our modern society comes at the price of human exploitation. This applies to all countries similarly as even developed countries may be reliant on cheap labor supplies from firms and factories located in developing countries. Therefore, it would clearly be unrealistic to push for an overnight elimination of modern slavery in all its forms. Instead, a gradual transformation into more sustainable and ethical labor practices should be promoted.

How should human resources be effectively allocated to tackle the issue?

Efficient resource allocation to tackle modern slavery requires a combination of financial resources, personnel, training, and technology. An effective resolution should provide a feasible strategy for allocating resources, most likely involving setting priorities according to the unique needs of different countries or regions.

How does trends of globalization change approaches?

It is crucial to examine the role our currently globalized and interconnected world plays in the issue. This can be interpreted from two perspectives. While the increased flow of information and mass media open up employment opportunities to more job-seeking individuals via the Internet, it also increases the chances of individuals falling into the trap of forced labor and exploitation. However, it can also be understood that media also drastically increases the impact of victims and their stories, thus raising awareness. Most importantly, it should be noted that the occurrence of modern slavery in a globalized world implies a greater share of responsibilities between countries in facilitating the resolution of this issue.

Bloc Positions

Developed nations

The occurrence of modern slavery does not necessarily entail poverty, nor does poverty guarantee the presence of modern slavery in a nation. However, response to the phenomena is what tends to vary among developed and developing nations. Most developed nations with relatively strong legislative power, capacity, and resources for enforcement, and technology-enabling investigations adopt legal measures to combat modern slavery. Additionally, developed countries may collaborate through regional and

international organizations to combat modern slavery. This includes sharing information, and best practices, and coordinating their responses to cases of modern slavery across borders. It's important to note that developed countries must continually assess their policies and practices to ensure that they maintain their focus on combating modern slavery. Additionally, developed countries must regularly monitor their own supply chains to ensure that they are free from modern slavery.

The United Kingdom

Placed as the country taking the most action to respond to modern slavery in the 2019 Global Slavery Index, the U.K. joins France, the Netherlands, and Australia as a handful of nations in the world that have introduced legislation targeting slavery in the last 10 years (Walk Free, 2019). However, the considerable awareness and governmental efforts to tackle modern slavery by targeting supply chains, shortcomings, and areas where victims are left behind by the system should also be noted.

Developing nations

As economic benefactors of unpaid labor most of the time, developing nations face economic and social challenges when it comes to eradicating modern slavery. In some cases, regional culture contributes to the normalization and prevalence of modern slavery. For instance, the deep-rooted caste system in India, stretching to South Asia in general, justifies debt bondage and forced labor. However, this applies to highly developed regions in the world similarly, such as in Hong Kong, where the culture of hiring domestic workers is integrated into society, making room for discrimination, exploitation, and abuse. Therefore, it cannot be said that developing nations are oblivious to the immoral and criminal nature of modern slavery, but factors such as economic dependency and resource constraints must also be acknowledged. As a result of this, most developing nations would favor both physical support and financial aid from developed nations towards domestic anti-slavery efforts.

Possible Solutions

Legislation

Despite the existence of protocols and acts on modern slavery in most countries, specific laws targeting areas such as employment registration, working conditions, and transparency in supply chains are yet to be established and internationalized. Legislation remains a fundamental step to take as it sets standards and principles, allowing enforcement agencies to identify and prosecute cases of violation.

System of penalties

Establishing explicit consequences and penalties is necessary in discouraging traffickers and perpetrators, ranging from businesses and companies to employers and even individuals, from direct or indirect engagement in modern slavery. This would also involve implementing strict regulations on businesses, recognizing corporate responsibility, and ensuring accountability.

Increasing supply chain transparency

Urging governments and businesses to promote transparency in global supply chains would allow instances of slavery or slavery-like practices to be identified and eliminated on a fundamental level. This may involve conducting regular audits, certifications, and inspections to ensure that products and services are free from forced labor. (e.g. develop anonymous reporting mechanism for suspected cases)

Cooperating with non-governmental organizations

General Assembly Resolution 60/251 explicitly states that “non-governmental organizations play an important role at the national, regional and international levels, in the promotion and protection of human rights”, further asserting that the council should work “in close cooperation in the field of human rights with Governments, regional organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society.”

Increasing consumer awareness

Educating consumers about the prevalence of modern slavery would induce the making of ethical choices, creating demand for slave-free products. Supporting fair trade initiatives and labels can help consumers identify goods produced under fair working conditions. Awareness of modern slavery in general could also be enhanced by supporting and spreading the stories of victims and survivors. (e.g. boycotts and protest spread via social media)

Addressing root causes

Tackling underlying socioeconomic factors such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities is essential to addressing the root causes of modern slavery and resolving the issue in the long run. Promoting economic development, ensuring fair trade, and providing access to education and healthcare can contribute to preventing vulnerable individuals from falling into slavery.

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