

## APPG for Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

26<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### General meeting for parliamentarians to consider the current legislation on supply chains related to the textile industry

**Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Dame Sara Thornton** highlighted how a high percentage of cotton is traced back to the Uighur region in China, which were linked with labour abuses. Regarding Leicester exploitation, the Alison Levitt review recognised labour abuses were occurring, but employers hadn't broken the law. Dame Sara mentioned the [FLEX report](#) recently published this month on labour abuse in the cleaning industry. 31% surveyed weren't paid for their work, and 21% wouldn't take time off if sick.

**Peter Andrews, Head of Sustainability Policy at the British Retail Consortium.** The UK has taken leadership in this sector and set a good example by the Modern Slavery Act. But as we get better in uncovering modern slavery, traffickers get better at evading detection. Businesses and law enforcement need to work better together in sharing intelligence. He raised the significant problem in the UK of labour exploitation that isn't quite modern slavery, but left unchecked it is getting worse, citing examples of car washes, nail bars, warehouses, factories. Garment factories tend to be in regional hubs, especially in Leicester. A licensing scheme would be hugely beneficial.

Regarding transparency, no level playing field as yet. There are responsible businesses and those that merely tick the boxes. There are great signs of responsible businesses abiding by regulations. Their fear is to be undercut by competitors who are not being transparent.

The EU is looking at mandatory human rights due diligence. This is something which the UK should consider. We are seeing state-led exploitation of workers in Asia. Responses need state-to-state guidance and interaction there. The UK and US are more outspoken on issues in China. We don't want to drive business away from countries that are less developed and don't have the same laws

**Dan Scully, Director at Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority,** outlined the role of the GLAA, and how they have an investigative and regulatory capacity, but do not have a role in enforcing Section 54 obligations. Visits to factories in Leicester can only happen by consent. There has to be a collaborative approach, as enforcement cannot work on its own.

**Eric Feldman, Department of Homeland Security in the US,** is from one of the biggest investigative agencies in the US working on security investigations. They investigate the culpability of employers, the criminal perspective of human trafficking and forced goods labour, in a multi-pronged approach. They work on an international outreach campaign for hot goods, and are interest in working more with the UK to educate employers and have conversations about forced labour and how it is illegal to import these goods into the UK.

**Jennifer Schroeder-Fawcett, US Customs and Border Protection,** works to ensure that goods being imported have not come from forced labour. If goods are found to undercut fair labour standards, that good cannot be imported into the US. Legislation needs to ensure those who are being transparent are not negatively impacted. Withhold and release orders try to put all businesses on a level playing field.