

Prime Minister of Malta Dr Joseph Muscat, statement for global anti-slavery cause

I am a firm believer in freedom and liberty. I stand against any attempt to limit another person in such a way that deprives them of the dignity and freedom every citizen should have, or the liberties that a country has provided.

As a member of the Commonwealth, I know that our shared solidarity and democratic values unite us against slavery and the exploitation of other human beings.

The Commonwealth brings together leaders from the most industrialised nations as well as some of the least developed nations. However, in our network of mutual support we can agree that slavery is an abhorrent act, and to exploit another human being for profit, transfer or disposal is unforgivable.

It is regrettable that we live in a world where even with all the progress, development, opportunities and rights for all, according to the Global Slavery Index, an estimated 45.8 million people in 167 different countries are still suffering some form of slavery.

Modern slavery is real and it is an issue we, as leaders, must tackle promptly and effectively.

Although European countries have the lowest prevalence of modern slavery, cases of forced labour, child labour and human trafficking are still occurring in our towns and our cities. Even Malta, with our current economic success, is faced with this problem and more needs to be done.

Cooperation in efforts to eliminate modern slavery is essential, and it needs to start now, for if not now, when?

Let us not wait generations to tackle such a social injustice and criminal activity. Every country can start making the small changes that can have a great impact – by monitoring our laws, ensuring ethical sourcing of products, and that businesses supply chains are clean and that action is taken when they are not.

We need to ensure assistance is provided to victims, with particular attention to children and their needs. On this note, we acknowledge the GRETA report published this month and shall be considering their recommendations.

Whether the victims are migrant workers, or children and whether the offence is child labour, wages or working conditions – the situations must be investigated, prosecuted in a prompt and effective manner.

As a head of Government, it is imperative to remind other leaders elsewhere that slavery is rooted in economics. Slavery increases in areas that are impoverished and where there are no real economic alternatives. Economic wealth, ensuring political stability and strong resources pave the way to combating modern slavery. My commitment is to strengthen my Government's determination as a contributor to stability and peace.

The way forward is through collaboration and partnership; we must share our resources and our knowledge on policies and interventions.

These abuses cannot be tackled successfully single-handedly, it will take the collaboration of Governments, NGOs, charities and other stakeholders to make a significant change.

Our priority is to ensure we are not providing the opportunities for individuals to exploit the vulnerable. I am in support of regulation and investing in proposals for government incentives to act against modern slavery.