



Kevin Hyland OBE

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4th April 2017

Dear Chief Executive Officer,

April 1st marked a year since Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 came into force, requiring businesses with a turnover of £36 million to annually publish statements on what they are doing to eradicate slavery from their supply chains.

Many companies are now engaging more openly than ever before and are tackling the issue head on, developing toolkits, running training programmes, and introducing agreements with suppliers.

The Modern Slavery Act has clearly pushed modern slavery up the business agenda and into the board room. Not only has it woken up businesses but other countries are now following suit with similar legislation.

In February 2017 France adopted legislation that requires certain companies to develop vigilance plans to identify and prevent adverse human rights impacts. February also saw the Dutch Parliament adopt the Child Labour Due Diligence Bill and the Australian Government announce a new inquiry into establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia. Switzerland too is currently considering similar legislation with a referendum on mandatory human rights due diligence expected in the near future.

The trend for business and human rights regulation is on an upward trajectory and the issue of slavery will remain firmly in the spotlight. Companies stuck in a mindset of 'what's the minimum I need to do' are not only putting human lives at risk but are also missing out on opportunities to use ethical business practices as a competitive edge.

Despite some positive steps forward since the Modern Slavery Act and a number of good statements being published, I remain disappointed that analysis has shown the quality to be weak overall. Many fail to meet the minimum requirements of being placed on a company's home page or signed off by senior leadership. Even statements that do legally comply have a lot of room for improvement with many simply being reiterations of generic human rights policies.

Of course, change takes time and I expect companies to be building on their statements year on year. I want to see companies working to understand their industry specific risks as

they build on their statements each year. I expect companies to be examining which commodities and operating regions are high risk and why, and, providing detailed information on what is being done to mitigate these identified risks.

Companies should also be working together in this endeavour. Many of the risks associated with both supply and demand are not unique to individual companies and are shared among sectors. Collective action is therefore vital. The quality of statements, and indeed the action on the ground, can be improved enormously if companies facing similar challenges pool their resources to understand how better to mitigate risks.

I therefore want to encourage you to work within your industry and with relevant trade bodies and NGOs to enhance your anti-slavery efforts.

Ending modern slavery is now a core target in the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Security Council are now grappling with the issue and the UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, has committed her government to leading the fight against what she has called 'the great human rights issue of our time'.

Now is the time for all sectors of society to act and use the current momentum galvanised around anti-slavery efforts to ensure that no human being's life is being used as a commodity.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KH' followed by a large, sweeping flourish that loops back to the left.

Kevin Hyland OBE
Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner