



**Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM**

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The Rt Hon Liz Truss MP  
Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade  
King Charles Street  
Whitehall  
SW1A 2AH

Dear Secretary of State,

### **Human rights and modern slavery in UK trade agreements post-Brexit**

I am writing to you in connection with my statutory responsibility to encourage good practice in the prevention of slavery and human trafficking offences.

The UK government has long demonstrated strong international leadership in the global fight against slavery. At the 2017 UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Theresa May launched a “Call to action to end forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking” as a commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8.7.

Our government has been at the forefront of collaboration with Five Eyes nations<sup>1</sup>, demonstrating a commitment to raising and harmonising international standards in public procurement. Subsequently, in March 2020, the UK became the first government in the world to publish a modern slavery statement, setting out efforts towards eradicating modern slavery from its operations and supply chains. This commitment, signed by the Prime Minister, sends out a strong signal to businesses and other nations and it is vital that, even during such uncertain times, we continue to keep up the momentum as we move into a new era of global trade.

In 2017 the Joint Committee on Human Rights encouraged the government to use Brexit as an opportunity to set higher human rights standards in future trade agreements<sup>2</sup>. I am acutely aware that, as talks intensify, this is a crucial period for UK trade negotiations. This is an opportune moment to reflect on principle 9 of The UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), which includes specific reference to states’ obligations to protect human rights when pursuing economic agreements with other states<sup>3</sup>. I am pleased that the UK led the way in producing a National Action Plan to implement the UNGPs and very much hope to see these principles reflected in new UK trade agreements.

I look forward to receiving your response. In the interests of transparency, I request that you respond in a way that enables me to publish your letter on my website.

**Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner**

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office (2018) [UK agrees principles for tackling modern slavery in supply chains](#)

<sup>2</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights (2017) [Human Rights and Business 2017: Promoting Responsibility and Ensuring Accountability](#)

<sup>3</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2011) [Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework”](#)