

IASC advisory panel: Minutes (27 January 2021)

Date: 27 January 2021
Time: 16.00 – 18.00 (Virtual meeting)

Members

The Rt Revd Dr Alastair Redfern	Chair, The Clewer Initiative (Advisory Panel Chair)
Lara Bundock	CEO and Founder, The Snowdrop Project
Mick Clarke	The Passage
The Rt Hon. Fiona Mactaggart	Chair, Agenda and Fawcett Society; former Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery
Julia Mulligan	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, North Yorkshire
Dr Paul Rigby	Lecturer in Social Work, University of Stirling (Scotland)
Gillian Rivers	Partner, Penningtons Manches Cooper
Sir Bernard Silverman FRS	Professor of Modern Slavery Statistics, Rights Lab, University of Nottingham
Yasmin Waljee OBE	International Pro Bono Director, Hogan Lovells
The Baroness Young of Hornsey OBE	Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sport, Modern Slavery and Human Rights

Apologies

Mel Wiggins MBE	Former Project Coordinator, Freedom Acts (Northern Ireland)
The Rt Hon. the Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE	Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

In attendance

Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM	Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner
Jennifer Townson	Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy
April McCoig	Victims and Partnership Policy Lead, IASC
Jenna Teasdale	International Policy Lead, IASC
Emma Crates	Private Sector Policy Lead, IASC
Richard Marsh	Law Enforcement and Prosecutions Policy Lead, IASC
Katie Lawson	Research and Innovation Policy Lead, IASC
Ed Bateman	Chief of Staff IASC

1. Introduction, minutes and actions of the last meeting (Rt Revd Dr Alastair Redfern, Chair, IASC advisory panel)

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Advisory Panel members, the Commissioner and her team. The minutes from the last Advisory Panel on 13 October 2020 were agreed.

Actions of last meeting:

The following actions outstanding from the previous meeting were completed:

Follow up letters were sent to the CEOs associated with the Operational Fort Review.

A copy of the Commissioner's letter to the Secretary of State for Education was provided to the chair of the Education Select Committee.

The Advisory Panel was provided with a copy of the Commissioner's letter to the Ministry of Justice responding to the CICS consultation.

Baroness Young asked that the action from 7 July 2020 in relation to anti-racism work within the sector be shown as 'ongoing' as the work is incomplete. This was agreed.

In relation to the ongoing action concerning the register of modern slavery statements, Dame Sara said that she had been shown the prototype digital register that did not include the statements but a URN link to the statements. The register entries have two sections. The first is mandatory and includes details of the business and the link to the statement. The second is not mandatory but includes several interesting fields that if searchable would provide a useful tool. Panel members suggested that when the register is put into legislation, both sections should be mandated.

Action – Dame Sara to raise with the Home Office making both sections of the modern slavery statements' register mandatory.

2. Deep dive - International

Dame Sara and Jenna Teasdale (International policy lead, IASC) presented a paper and overview of the Commissioner's ongoing activity in relation to International work.

2.1 Support and challenge of HMG's international activity

Jenna explained that the IASC meets quarterly with the Home Office and FCDO to discuss priorities and current workstreams and where we can best support or provide challenge to this work. One structured way in which we have done this has been through formal challenge sessions. We recently participated in a reprioritisation challenge session with the Home Office and FCDO, during which we had an opportunity to input on prioritisation criteria and metrics and where and how the UK can make the most impact. A second challenge session focused on the implications of the EU Settlement

Scheme and the UK's new points-based immigration system for victims and survivors of modern slavery.

Jenna advised the meeting that the Commissioner was focussing on International trade and supply chains and that Dame Sara has recently exchanged letters with Liz Truss MP, Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade, and Greg Hands MP, Minister of State for Trade Policy emphasising the importance of reflecting human rights and modern slavery in UK trade agreements post-Brexit.

We have also supported research being undertaken by Royal Holloway, University of London on climate policy, emissions and labour rights in the brick industry. This contributes to a wider project on the secondary impacts of trade.

The 2019/21 IASC Strategic Plan highlights concerns associated with the risk assessment process in relation to the voluntary returns and reintegration of victims. Only a small number of victims and survivors appear to be using the Home Office's Voluntary Returns Scheme and we are currently working to understand the current context and identify examples of good practice.

Discussion

The Commissioner was asked whether her office was in touch with Polish or other community initiatives that supported their nationals return home. April McCoig, IASC lead on victims, said that she was beginning to identify community led repatriation initiatives but welcomed details of any groups known to the Panel.

Action - Panel members to provide details of community led repatriation initiatives for the attention of April McCoig.

2.2 Engagement with international fora

Jenna said that IASC was engaging with a range of international organisations and projects that included the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); the Liechtenstein Initiative/Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking, the International Bar Association; the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

Discussion

The Panel agreed that the work with NGOs to engage and encourage CEOs of financial institutions to personally focus on labour exploitation was a good initiative.

2.3 Vietnam and the Grays tragedy

Jenna provided a summary of IASC's engagement with Essex Police following the tragic deaths of 39 Vietnamese people in October 2019. Dame Sara commissioned the NCA National Assessment Centre to undertake a review of the nature and scale of modern slavery linked to Vietnamese people and conducted a series media interviews ahead of the sentencing. We are now working with Essex Police to understand good practice and learning from the Grays incident to other Forces.

Discussion

Panel members acknowledged the Commissioner's good work in putting out strong messages helping people focus on the important issues. Members reminded the Commissioner of the benefit of engaging with Pacific Links and discussed the potential, perverse impact of the tragedy 'stimulating trade' for the traffickers as the victims are seen to have 'successfully' got to the UK. Some pro bono work was being done by law firms on financial investigation in relation to the case and contact has been made with both the CPS and Police.

Action - IASC to make contact with the new leadership at Pacific Links

2.4 Borders and immigration

A substantial amount of the office's recent work has focused on immigration policy, spanning the international, victims and law enforcement portfolios. This includes the identification of potential victims of trafficking among those arriving on small boats; the impact of Brexit on modern slavery, the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) and the UK's new points-based immigration system.

Discussion

Panel members raised concerns about information provision for overseas domestic workers. Dame Sara said that she had raised this issue with Home Office Ministers. Broadly, there are plans to review the overseas domestic worker visa.

3. **The role of Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy - Jennifer Townson**

Jennifer Townson thanked the Panel for inviting her to the meeting and began by outlining her role that is to further partnerships between HMG and other governments complementing the work of Ministers, engaging with ambassadors and international networks. Jennifer acknowledged the positive working relationship she enjoys with the Commissioner while recognising Dame Sara's independence and statutory role to challenge. Jennifer said that she was focussing on four areas: countries that present the highest risk in relation to people being trafficked into the UK; countries with a high prevalence of problems manifesting on UK shores; maintaining positive, consensual relationships with international anti-trafficking organisations, particularly those that can contribute to change (UNODC, ILO); and, a range of cross cutting themes including transparency in supply chains. Jennifer commented on the negative worldwide impact of COVID adding to the vulnerability of already at risk exploited workers and the challenges of a shrinking UK economy and reduction in overseas aid. Coordination and cooperation were becoming more critical if we are to be successful in engaging with other governments to reduce modern slavery. We must encourage people to look at the issue not only through a moral lense but also understand the development and economic benefits of tackling modern slavery.

Discussion

The chair thanked Jennifer for attending and for her presentation. Panel members commented that Jennifer's closing comments 'that tackling modern slavery had development and economic benefits' resonated with the work of Professor James Cockayne and his recently published report 'Developing

Freedom – the sustainable development case for ending modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking’.

Action - the link to the [Developing Freedom](#) report to be circulated to the Advisory Panel

4. IASC briefing

- (a) The Commissioner advised the Panel that on become aware that funding had gone to 18 Police and Crime Commissioner’s to develop Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), she had [written](#) to the PCCs asking them to respond as to how the considerable overlap between modern slavery, exploitation and serious violence is reflected in their strategic priorities and intervention activity. Most replies have been received and many PCCs have a focus on modern slavery.

Panel members supported the Commissioner’s initiative but there was concern that focus must go beyond the PCCs that had been funded to set up VRUs to include other PCCs that were doing excellent work without additional money. The point was made that ‘rural’ PCCs don’t have the capacity or dedicated units of the city Forces and gaps in services were ‘knitted together’. Panel members discussed whether funding associated with the soon to be rolled out Home Office ‘local decision making pilots’ could stretch across to fill some of the service gaps.

- (b) The Commissioner reported that she had [written](#) to the Home Secretary raising concerns regarding the impact on the homeless of the new Immigration Rules and received a reply.

A Panel member said that it was ‘great’ that CRISIS had brought together so many NGOs and sector interests to sign the letter to the Home Secretary. The Home Office initiative, if not rescinded, provided further material to be used by exploiters to dissuade victims from going to the police or authorities. There was a strong correlation between modern slavery and rough sleeping and NGOs should continue to petition the Home Office.

- (c) The Commissioner reported that she had provided a comprehensive [written](#) response to the Sentencing Council consultation on Modern Slavery offences. Richard Marsh, IASC Law Enforcement and Prosecutions lead, provided a summary of the response.

Panel members commented that it was a good response.

- (d) The Commissioner reported that she had also provided a comprehensive [written](#) response to the Ministry of Justice’s Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS) consultation. April McCoig, IASC Victims and Partnership lead provided a summary of the response.

Panel members agreed that it was a helpful response particularly in challenging the view that injuries should be physical to be compensated i.e. threats to commit violence or PTSD from continued exposure to violence should have equal value.

- (e) The Commissioner reported that she had recently followed up the initial Operation Fort letters to CEOs with a further [communication](#) updating them on activity and asking them for their experience of employing the IASC Maturity Framework across their business. Dame Sara has that she has already received some very positive replies. Today, she has received a letter from the CEO of M&S raising concerns that a ‘clean bill of health’ provided by an ethical audit does not necessarily resonate with the experience of people on the ground (see attached Oxfam report [Working in Marks and Spencer’s Food and Footwear Supply Chains](#)).

- (f) The Commissioner introduced a discussion as to the impact on the sector and to victim's/survivors of the most recent lockdown.

There was a wide ranging discussion that began with a question as to the position should a survivor in safe house choose not to be vaccinated. A view was expressed that the Home Office had not 'stepped up' to the latest lock down. An example given was that the Home Office had begun to move people on from accommodation, but local authorities will not accept them leaving survivors homeless. There was a real delay in getting services to 'high needs' cases. Where there are specific post NRM projects such as Snowdrop in South Yorkshire some of this is being picked up but, generally, there is no provision. There was a suggestion that framing the problem as a 'public health' issue is more likely to get traction. This was an approach supported by HMG health advisor Professor Andrew Hayward. A member brought up the challenges of delayed trials and the negative impact on victims. Although the GLAA were reporting trials now going into 2023, this was not recognised by the CPS or the Courts Service. The Commissioner said that she remained concerned about the delays in prosecutions. Richard Marsh had met with the Court Service who reassured him that there were no trials going into 2023.

Action - the Panel agreed to share information should examples of 2023 trial dates become known.

5. IASC Budget and resourcing

Ed Bateman, IASC Chief of staff, presented a short paper to the Panel and an overview of the current position on budget and resourcing. Nine months into the financial year (December) the office had spent £458,953 of an annual budget of £605,000 made up of £545,000 from the Home Office and a contribution of £30,000 from both the Scotland and Northern Ireland Devolved Administrations.

Regarding recruitment, Ed Bateman had been selected in a competitive process in December for the chief of staff post and interviews for the vacant Communications Officer role are scheduled for 8th February 2021. The office is currently speaking with a small number of NGOs with a view to recruiting a survivor of slavery as an eight week paid intern. The intern will deliver a specific research project likely to focus on exploring models for survivor engagement within anti-slavery work or examining barriers to sustainable independence for survivors of modern slavery in the UK.

6. AOB and closing remarks

The chair thanked Panel members for their generous contribution and commended the Commissioner and her team for their continued amazing work despite resource constraints. The meeting closed at 1759.