**Draft statement – International Day for the Abolition of Slavery***2 December 2023*

The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery is a poignant reminder that contemporary forms of slavery – including forced labour, forced marriage, domestic servitude, debt bondage, and child marriage and labour – continue to persist in our increasingly digital world. As we continue to rebuild and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must move on from the outdated notion that economic growth on its own is sufficient to address poverty and structural inequalities, key factors that enable contemporary forms of slavery. The COVID-19 pandemic refuted this model, exposing how those facing discrimination prior to the pandemic were disproportionately affected, and continue to face a steeper road to recovery, including women and girls, who comprise over half of the nearly 50 million people subject to contemporary forms of slavery, a testament to enduring gender inequality. Such pre-existing vectors of inequality were exacerbated as millions of workers were pushed into unemployment or into the ever-expanding gig economy, with jobs characterized by casualty, precariousness, and a lack of social benefits – conditions ripe for contemporary forms of slavery, among other grave human rights violations, including of the right to life and protection from torture, ill-treatment, and enforced disappearances.

This paradigm of unsustainable and unequal growth promotes a race to the bottom where workers are treated as a disposable commodity in the name of maximizing profits. We must work instead towards the realization of a [human rights economy](https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/04/building-economies-place-peoples-human-rights-center) that places people and the planet at the heart of economic policies, investment decisions, consumer choices, and business models to enhance the enjoyment of human rights for all in the long term. This includes measures that make decent work a universal standard, safeguard and expand workers’ rights to organize, bargain collectively, and access justice as well as policies to prevent contemporary forms of slavery, such as strengthening supply chain transparency, and mandatory human rights due diligence legislation, particularly in high-risk industries where forced labour and hazardous working conditions are common, such as the maritime and mining sectors, or in places of detention. Governments should also reform or repeal economic policies that create additional structural vulnerabilities and lend themselves to extreme exploitation and power asymmetries between employers and workers, including employer-specific work permit regimes for migrant workers and the shift towards “independent contractor” business models that curtail access to social benefits, employer accountability, and legal remedies.

The transition towards a human rights economy requires the active engagement of the private sector. This is especially true of the technology sector and the transnational giants within this sector, given the outsize role these companies’ products and services play in our daily lives, in shaping global markets and policies, and enabling or inhibiting the expression of fundamental rights. Technology plays a significant role in both [facilitating and preventing contemporary forms of slavery](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/203/75/PDF/N2320375.pdf?OpenElement) and while technological advancements have created new avenues for exploitation, they have also provided tools and platforms to prevent and address these practices. Technology companies should work with Governments, civil society, and the international community to enable use of their platforms to prevent contemporary forms of slavery and conduct meaningful human rights due diligence to ensure their products and services do not facilitate contemporary forms of slavery, as well as ensure decent work at all levels of their supply chains and workforces. Workers themselves, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds including women, minorities, LGBTQ+ persons, persons of African descent, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, displaced persons, older persons, and persons with disabilities, should enjoy informed participation and meaningful engagement in workplace decisions as part of the transition towards a human rights economy.

A human rights economy must meet the Sustainable Development Goals’ imperative to “leave no one behind”, including those who have experienced or at risk of contemporary forms of slavery. The [UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery](https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/funding-and-budget/trust-funds/united-nations-voluntary-trust-fund-contemporary-forms-slavery) helps thousands of slavery survivors worldwide to receive essential services and supports civil society to combat and address these practices. Member States and companies should contribute to the Fund, to strengthen the anti-slavery movement.

As we prepare to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights next week, we reemphasize its absolute prohibition of slavery or servitude in all its forms. We must not let the call to “build back better” from the pandemic be empty rhetoric. We must heed the High Commissioner’s clarion call for a human rights economy if we are to achieve a world free of contemporary forms of slavery.

ENDS

*The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery marks the date of the adoption, by the General Assembly, of the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (resolution 317(IV) of 2 December 1949). Today, the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery recalls the date of the adoption of this first Convention to fight human trafficking by the United Nations General Assembly*.

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