**Hope For Justice Submissions For Un Special Rapporteur On Contemporary Forms Of Slavery**

**13 April 2023**

# 1. Technology (facilitating and/or preventing contemporary forms of slavery)

***In this submission:***

• Experience and reflections from the Hope for Justice programmes in Cambodia: short term trauma-informed residential care for girl survivors of modern slavery, community and family reunification and intendent living skills building for older adolescent girls.

• Experience and reflections from the Hope for Justice programmes in Ethiopia: community prevention programmes, including self-help groups of families at highest risk of modern slavery, short term trauma-informed residential care for boy and girl survivors of modern slavery (Lighthouses), community and family reunification, and advocacy.

• An invitation for the modern slavery sector to engage on Confidential Computing as a promising technological solution to overcome barriers for agencies, statutory bodies, and civil society to exchange critical information across borders. Aimed to identify and support victims and survivors of modern slavery, identify perpetrators, and understand trends in modern slavery across borders, while preserving the confidentiality of the data and safeguarding survivors.

## **Cambodia**

In the past 3 years, and especially following the outbreak of Covid-19, resultant school closures, and children going online for education, we have seen a very significant increase on the number of children – especially girls – who are being **groomed via smartphones**. There are specific apps such as Tik-Tok and gaming apps but also Facebook, Facebook Messenger and other common social media apps through which predators access children, often posing as peers.

They start a casual relationship with them and then start to groom them into a trusting relationship, often asking them to send nude/explicit photos. At this point they are able to use that sexually explicit material to blackmail and threaten the child to send more explicit images with the threat that if they do not comply, they will expose them to parent/boyfriend/ teacher or other trusted friends (by now they have learned who are key people in their lives).

The next step is to meet off-line to either continue the grooming process with food/alcohol/cash or to immediately arrange to meet them with the intention of having sex. It is from this point that many girls are offered jobs (in beer gardens/karaoke bars etc) and where sexual services with underage girls are part of the hidden aspect of the job that the girl is not informed about.

Alternatively, the girl is offered a job locally where she could earn e.g. $500-600/month or she is lured into marriage in (often) China where she is made a promise of being matched with a wealthy business-man or factory owner, or just offered a high paying job but in reality it is sex work or forced marriage.

Prior to Covid, most girl children were trafficked and exploited by way of a person physically visiting their area, targeting vulnerable families or children and physically setting up a job, paying parents a fee, or offering lucrative jobs to rural families for their daughters in the city in a restaurant (but actually beer garden/bar with underaged sexual services) or for marriage with a wealthy Chinese businessman.

* **These days, 90% or more of the clients we see at our centers have all been groomed online and then met off-line and gone into various forms of exploitation as per above.**

The other type of exploitation using technology that is growing more common in Cambodia is using online recruitment for participation **in IT scamming schemes,** where perpetrators target local, Khmer speaking people to engage online with scamming schemes. These take place with nationals, but also with foreign nationals from Thailand, Vietnam, and other regions with the lure of a high-paying tech job. We have recorded stories of suspicious hotels or previous casinos being sealed off to the outside world where young people are being recruited in with the lure of a high paying job. They accept the job, are brought to that secure site, their identity documents or passport are taken, and they are forced sit at a computer all day in their room for up to 14-16 hours per day to engage with people by phone or social media to scam them for money. They are not allowed out, have no ID card, are not paid, and only get time off if they meet certain targets.

* Recently we heard of a raid on a place like this in Battambong near the Thai border where over 70 internationals were engaged. Ten of them were reportedly children under 18 years of age. The local authorities contacted us as to our availability to take in the 10 minors for care and we accepted. The next day they called us and said the children wouldn’t be coming now as the case had been re-classified as an ‘undocumented migrant’ issue, and not a trafficking case. This was just around the time that Cambodia was downgraded to a Tier 3 trafficking country in the most recent US TIP report of 2022, and our concern was that they were trying to minimize the number of cases classed as trafficking to keep up appearances that they were on top of the problem. This points to a major systemic issue concerning trafficking reclassification and the possibility that future such cases of forced labor (which can lead to other forms of exploitation) may no longer be captured or prosecuted correctly.

## **Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, the vast majority of child survivors and children at risk of modern slavery we work with are from rural areas, are poorly educated, come from dysfunctional or harmful family backgrounds, and are digitally non-literate. They have poor access to advanced mobile technology and thus are easier targets for perpetrators. The profile of survivors in our care is children who are undervalued, underpaid, unprotected, poorly regulated, victims of attitudinal deterioration, and derogatory naming and treatment.These children may not develop the ICT capacity to find, select and use data effectively for communication as they have no other computer or mobile internet access. The most common way to communicate with brokers is using a mobile phone.

According to the Ethiopia statistical service and IOM (2021), a report on the digital literacy of all migrants shows that most migrants (73.7%) are able to use cell phones, and the rest able to use computers/tablets/laptops (18.5%) or able to use the internet (27.6%). This study further explained that 25% of deported returnees are interested in returning to Middle Eastern countries, as they provide economic opportunities not available to them in Ethiopia.

Traffickers use all legal and illegal broadcasting media (including mainstream media) in the name of licensed consultancy, or private employment agency for recruiting and transporting people for exploitation. A key part of the deception is disseminating information about the bright side of migration, focusing only on success stories. This then becomes a social norm – for young people to migrate for work without understanding the key risks involved in engaging in this work. The peer pressure is high. The perpetrator’s use of ICT is limitless in its ability to facilitate their criminal motives. A further lack of resources to combat trafficking using technology exacerbates this problem nationally, and lack of regulation promotes illicit uses of technology for trafficking to thrive.

Furthermore, there is no survivor-friendly online information or communication system as a resource for high-risk individuals. Considering the current poor development and expansion of ICT in general, the potential to use ICT as a tool to reduce modern slavery through identifying criminals is limited. Facilitating rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors is also a challenge because there is a major data management and sharing gap that leads to inefficient usage of resources and poor partnership, coordination, and understanding between multiple sectors that could work together to combat trafficking and slavery. As a result, efforts are increasingly limited to promote awareness and information exchange relating to recruitment, preventing, and responding to human trafficking and modern slavery.

**Confidential Computing to Fight Modern Slavery**

The anti-slavery sector overwhelmingly recognizes the need to collaborate in data generation and use. Globally, organizations working on cases of human trafficking have collected large pools of valuable data on both victims of slavery, perpetrators, as well as contextual information relating to emerging patterns and trends. However, there is an apparent lack of trust among institutions, a fear of divulging confidential and sensitive information about people affected by modern slavery, as well as competing interests for funding with resource and skill limitations undermining such efforts. These are challenges that the entire sector has been grappling with for years, but some recent advancements in technology look promising for bringing some solutions.

Hope for Justice, in collaboration with INTEL, has been exploring a way for key global actors of the modern slavery response to overcome the barriers for an effective collaboration to exchange data utilizing Confidential Computing.

In April 2024, Hope for Justice finished the development of PDEx (Private Data Exchange), a Confidential Computing-based proof of concept to dummy-test this technology as a solution for the specific challenges facing human trafficking and modern slavery, while preserving key tenets of privacy. PDEx enables organizations and institutions across borders working against modern slavery to confidentially pool data related to individual cases. After data from these groups is encrypted and uploaded, the application aggregates and analyses it, then notifies appropriate agencies when the system identifies relevant data matches (for example, the near-matching name of a potential victim or perpetrator, a significant location, or and ID number).

PDEx is not a product. Hope for Justice developed it as a platform to facilitate an open practical discussion among public institutions, international and national non-governmental originations, UN agencies, and other agents combating modern slavery. The aim is to explore the notion of Confidential Computing to further collaboration adapting the technology that is currently available to the sector to make a significant impact right now to end modern slavery in the world.

# 2. Homelessness (as a cause and a consequence of contemporary forms of slavery)

***In this submission:***

• Experience and reflections from the Hope for Justice programmes in Uganda and Ethiopia: community prevention programmes, including self-help groups of families at highest risk of modern slavery, outreach work with homeless families and children at highest risk, short term trauma-informed residential care for boys and girls survivors of modern slavery (Lighthouses), community and family reunification, and advocacy.

## **Uganda**

Homelessness among children places them at high risk of modern slavery and exploitation. Vulnerable children include street children, children experiencing rejection from their families, runaway children, and unaccompanied children. Without any adult care and protection, traffickers use their networks to easily recruit, abduct, and transport such children to locations where they are abused. Normally, traffickers place a very low value on a child’s life, hence finding it easy to manipulate such children. The following stories illustrate the types of exploitation these children face as a result of homelessness.

 ***“****Following the death of my Father, My Mother consequently ran mad, and this left me on my own. My paternal aunt came to my rescue and took me in like her own. However, my aunt being alcoholic and economically weak did not make the situation any better. I yearned to go to school but there was nobody to support me. My aunt would at times get drunk and fall on the way, and that’s where she would sleep. I would most of the time be alone at home. I dropped out of school due to lack of school fees and soon started loitering in the community, trying to fend for myself. At times, I would move to the homes of neighbors where I would be given food and accommodation. My aunt never bothered to look for me as long as she knew where I was. I then met a lady who promised to connect me for a Job in Kampala (City) with good pay. With excitement I took up the deal and found myself in the city to work as a house maid. For the six months that I worked, life was not any better. I was mistreated, subjected to too much work, physically beaten, and later chased away without any pay. I found myself on the streets but with help of a good Samaritan, I found myself at police which referred me to Hope for Justice*” - Narrated by a child at Bulamu Girls’ Lighthouse

*“My name is Dora (not real name). I am 14 years old. Before I came to Hope for Justice, I was living with my paternal aunt with whom I have lived for 5 years. My aunt was such a tough woman that she could make me do hard labor and as a child. I felt I was overworked. She used to make me do all house chores, not limited to carrying heavy jerrycans of water on my head and if I failed to abide by her rules, she would flog me terribly.*

*One day as I came back from school before reaching the doorsteps, I overheard her quarrelling in the house while mentioning my name, I stopped outside and listened silently and then I decided to enter into the house though terrified. No sooner had I entered than she started shouting at me on top of her voice and I knew that the next thing was being flogged. I waited for her to step out and I stealthily picked two clothes from the bedroom and ran away. I walked away angrily and aimlessly, not knowing where to go.*

*As it was approaching dusk, I met a boda boda man (motorbike taxi driver) who asked me where I was going, and I told him that I didn’t know. He then asked me if I could work for his cousin as a domestic worker and I accepted because I had no option. Immediately he called his cousin and informed her that he had gotten a girl for her. She then told him to take me to her home, which he did. On arrival to her home, he handed me to her and she oriented me on the duties. I started working and work was too much but I endured because I had no option. At the end of the month, I expected to be paid some money but in vain. I encouraged myself hoping that she would pay me in the near future. After three months I tried to request for my pay but she didn’t give me anything. I therefore resorted to reporting her to police and police arrested her and ordered that she pays my wages. I was then referred to Hope for Justice, Mary Lighthouse.”* Narrated by a child at Mary Girls’ Lighthouse

## **Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, people experience homelessness due to poverty, domestic violence, family conflict, unemployment, trafficking, and systemic failure. The capacity of these vulnerable groups to negotiate with employers is limited. For example, most women and children migrate seeking a better life from rural areas to Addis Ababa and they engage in domestic work. However, their assumptions, expectations and dreams become nightmares when forced into domestic work and experiencing abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) at the hands of their employers, with no opportunity to escape or report to police.

In the majority of rural Ethiopian households, livelihood strategies of families are traditional agriculture, small trade of commodities, small scale factories, and migration. The living income in these areas is insufficient for large families. Most families struggle to pay for necessities such as food, housing, clothes, education, or healthcare. Homeless people are further unable to afford these. The inability to meet the needs is reflected in the struggles to pay food fees, medical care or clothing or personal needs such as sanitary pads for girls. This drives children to work in domestic servitude and in forced labor in agriculture, fishing, and mining just to meet their survival needs. Some children work with their parents in the street, while others go to other houses/businesses and then bring money home to supplement family income to buy basic needs such as food and clothing. In most cases, children work in exploitative conditions to meet the family needs and to support themselves. Family financial capacity to address their children’s income is insufficient to over needs. Paying for adequate housing is a challenge. Families and children struggle to provide sufficient and acceptable food with their current income. Poor families are not always able to send their children to school due to financial reasons.

Lack of ability to pay leads to negative consequences, as children are enforced to engage in any work, including sex work, illicit activities, or forced labor – essentially, in situations where they are unable to access their rights or protection from harm. As the consequence of homelessness, children and women are more vulnerable to engage in exploitative working environment in which their basic rights are likely violated, and they may experience abuse, violation, exploitation or coercion. This leads to physical, psychological and social problems and further increases the risk of being forced into modern slavery.