**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES**

**SECTION ON ARCHIVES AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**CALL FOR INPUT ON THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN FACILITATING AND PREVENTING CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SLAVERY**

Comments submitted by the Section on Archives and Human Rights,

International Council on Archives, 14 April 2023

The International Council on Archives [ICA], an international association created in 1948 to promote the development of archives, with advisory status to UNESCO in the field of archives and documentary heritage, commends the preparation of a report on the use of technology in facilitating and preventing contemporary forms of slavery.

Supporting this initiative, the International Council on Archives, informed by the work of its Section on Archives and Human Rights [SAHR], is pleased to share experiences and recommendations that relate to archives in this context.

Records of business are crucial sources for understanding the nature of modern slavery. Ensuring that reliable records are produced and preserved is critical, allowing them to be used by artificial intelligence and other research techniques to identify potential enslavement. Software used in business can record supply chain operations at a very granular level, allowing researchers to look for correlations between particular actions and the employment of forced labour and exploitation.

For example, Sedex, a U.K.-based membership organization that aims to help companies “manage and improve working conditions in global supply chains,” released a report in October 2021 based on its review of “over 100,000 social audits conducted across 158 countries over the past five years.” It found that 36% of social audits “found multiple indicators (two or more) of forced labour. While it was known that forced labour is an under-identified issue, this figure being over a third of the sizeable data sample is a truly serious revelation.” The most common forced labour found was the exploitive use of overtime. It would have been impossible for Sedex to review that volume of social audits without the use of advanced computer software. (<https://www.sedex.com/reports_whitepapers/sedex-insights-report-recognising-forced-labour-risks-in-global-supply-chains-with-data-from-100000-audits/>)

For another example, Olam International, one of the world’s top cocoa processors, said on its website that the “company could trace its cocoa all the way from the farm to its processing facilities across the world;” however, in a lawsuit by Brazilian state prosecutors for allegedly “failing to address labour abuses” in its supply chain, Olam said that if it bought beans from a middleman “there is no way for the buyer of the commodity to know where it came from,” *Thomson Reuters Foundation* reported. Prosecutors said they have “proof of child and slave labour in Olam’s supply chain” and “invoices attached to the lawsuit show the company bought cocoa from a farm in Brazil where nine workers were found in slavery-like conditions in 2017.” Almost surely the invoices were found by using software to probe the company’s records and the supply chain revealed. (<https://news.trust.org/item/20210812130016-jf5im/>)

To be sure, many enslavers do not work in legal environments, such as the traffickers who use electronic means to lure unsuspecting individuals to promised jobs which, upon arrival, turn out to be prostitution. But legal businesses must be pressured to adhere to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which implicitly require reliable record-keeping throughout the business cycle. Only with the creation and preservation of accurate business records will it be possible for investigators to research the labour practices that are emblematic of contemporary slavery.

Examples are provided here in response to question 8 of the discussion document.

***8. Is there evidence of modern technology (e.g. applications, artificial intelligence and blockchain technology) being used to prevent contemporary forms of slavery? If so, please provide details.***

a. Smart cards for identification, instead of paperwork that can be more easily altered.

b. Everledger blockchain, My-Story blockchain. Block chain technology is especially useful for compartmentalising large quantities of data, which is difficult to change. This ensures a high level of accurate historical data. However, it is not a silver bullet.

(<https://insights.aib.world/article/13542-can-blockchain-help-resolve-modern-slavery-in-supply-chains>)

c. Biometric information or the use of facial recognition software