**Maat for Peace’ Submission on the Use of Technology to Facilitate and Prevent Contemporary Forms of Slavery**

**Introduction**

Technological developments, especially social media, have had a significant impact on human rights, especially in recent decades. It allowed traffickers to adopt new ways for recruiting victims. Recent technological developments have also produced many applications that have contributed significantly to the increasing rates of human rights violations in general and contemporary slavery in particular.

Within its interest in the thematic reports that the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery including its causes and consequences, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** would like to present its contribution on the topic raised about the impact of technology on facilitating or preventing contemporary forms of slavery by answering some of the questions raised by the Special Rapporteur on the subject.

**First: Using modern technology (such as platforms including social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, websites and apps, artificial intelligence, and the dark network) to recruit individuals and subject them to contemporary forms of slavery**

An estimated 50 million people worldwide suffer from modern slavery. Violations target vulnerable people including children, women, and girls. Compared to global estimates from 2016, there were 10 million more people in modern slavery in 2021, with women and children disproportionately at risk. More than half of all forced labor and a quarter of all forced marriages in middle-income States are from upper classes or high-income countries[[1]](#footnote-1).

Modern slavery is a complex crime affecting all nations as digital platforms are used daily by human traffickers to advertise fake job offers and to market exploitative services to potential clients. Victims are recruited through social media by smugglers making use of publicly available personal information and the anonymity to contact victims. Hence online trafficking has become increasingly diverse and extends from the advertising to victims online, traffickers using communication platforms to broadcast exploitation abroad to interacting with potential victims or transferring money between members of a human trafficking group. There have been cases of human traffickers coercing victims into a relationship with clients in chat rooms monitored by traffickers and there is ample evidence of the growth of child sexual abuse material online some of which is related to human trafficking. Traffickers also forced their victims to commit crimes or forced labor or used Internet technologies to advertise the sale of organs[[2]](#footnote-2).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) confirmed that three generic types of platforms were identified in which trafficking methods and features of victims and offenders differed from the platform used.

* Social media including Facebook, Myspace, Skype, WhatsApp, Vkontakte (Russian song listing platform or site)
* Ad classified web pages refer to public websites where individuals post ads or browse items or services to buy or sell.
* Independent web pages refer to websites created by human traffickers that are not part of larger domains.

In some cases, things get worse to allow direct exploitation of the victims, especially domestic workers, as reports revealed that domestic workers are being bought and sold illegally in a growing black market on the Internet via electronic apps available in the Google and Apple stores, and hashtags promoted through Instagram. There is an electronic slave market, and this type of trafficking is particularly prevalent in the Gulf countries[[3]](#footnote-3).

Where it became active, especially in the Arab Gulf countries (Kuwait - Saudi Arabia - Iraq), an electronic black market for the sale of domestic workers through electronic apps available in Google and Apple stores and hashtags as it is promoted through the Instagram app. The applications provide the ability to browse photos of thousands of domestic workers, classified according to race, and any of them can be purchased for a few thousand dollars, in what resembles a slave market and represents a cover for a forms of modern slavery. These apps also contributed to the increase in the phenomenon of human trafficking, especially girls and women, as human trafficking gangs resorted to social networking sites, specifically Facebook, to buy and sell girls, as ISIS is not the only one that traffics in human beings[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Among the most important applications used for trafficking domestic workers in the Arab Gulf**

* **4Sales app**: It is widely used in **Kuwait**, where the '4Sale' application allows the classification and selection of female workers by race, as they are classified into different segments, and prices are set according to the demand for these segments. It also enables the employer to transfer the worker's bail to others for profit. This eliminates the role of intermediaries and creates an unmonitored black market that makes female workers more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. For instance, someone buys a female worker for 600 Kuwaiti dinars ($2,000) and sells her for 1,000 dinars ($3,300). Although the employment of domestic workers under the age of 21 is prohibited in Kuwait. However, the sale of children under the age of 16 is traded on online orders.
* **Haraj app**: It is widely used in **Saudi Arabia**, where hundreds of women are sold through this application, besides selling hundreds more via Instagram.
* **In Iraq**, human trafficking is widespread on social media platforms, especially Facebook, which has become a front for displaying victims and negotiating prices ranging from US $ 3 to US $4,000[[5]](#footnote-5).

**Second: the positive measures taken by technology companies to prevent the use of their techniques to facilitate contemporary forms of slavery**

Several major tech companies have disclosed numerous human rights violations linked to modern slavery in their supply chains, with Apple and Microsoft reporting more than 50 suppliers that did not meet human rights compliance standards, while Amazon cited the discovery of human rights violations in 10% of their supplier base. These results are not surprising given that large technology companies have complex global supply chains and direct contacts with high-risk industries such as mineral sources, metal refining needed to manufacture electronics or so-called conflict minerals obtained from unstable conflict zones, big tech companies have suppliers operating in countries linked to higher risk than the rates of various forms of modern slavery where the mineral trade is used to fuel forced labor, bonded labor, support corruption, money laundering, finance armed groups and finance other human rights violations[[6]](#footnote-6).

**To combat this, companies took a number of measures to prevent the facilitation of modern slavery, including:**

* Microsoft, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon all employ external auditors to regularly review the employment practices of their existing suppliers. For example, Apple reported interviewing more than 57,000 workers in its supply chain and more than 34,000 follow-up phone calls were made to verify that there was no retaliation against these workers for their participation in evaluation interviews.
* If audits reveal supply chain gaps, big tech companies report working closely with suppliers to develop corrective action plans and resolve the problems detected. Suppliers are required to implement corrective and preventive actions for all audit findings discovered within specified deadlines, failure to do so can end the relationship with them. For example in 2019 an Amazon audit revealed staffing fee payments and passport retention issues with one supplier. The investigation ultimately resulted in the termination of the relationship due to the supplier's unwillingness to make the necessary reform.
* Big tech companies have implemented a code of conduct that requires their suppliers to source materials responsibly. Suppliers are also required to apply these terms to their sub-contractors, third-party recruitment agencies, next-tier suppliers, and through all levels of the supply chain. For example since 2009, Apple has directed the removal of 146 3TG smelters and refineries that didn’t meet Apple’s requirements for the responsible sourcing of minerals. And in 2019 Microsoft expanded its work with NGO partner Pact to eliminate child labor in the metal supply chain. Positive results included the identification and rehabilitation of 2000 children of miners[[7]](#footnote-7).
* Social media have been used to highlight commercial slavery by corporations. This has led to boycotting of commercial services or products, forcing companies to embrace and establish zero-tolerance policies against repressive labor practices. In the tech-space, Apple and Google maintain a zero-tolerance policy for online trafficking and slave-like transactions after being [implicated](https://www.thepatriot.co.bw/news/item/7712-google,-apple,-facebook-are-enabling-an-illegal-online-slave-market-of-domestic-workers-in-the-gulf.html) in enabling online slave markets on their platforms. Facebook highlighted banning the hashtag that translated to #maidsfortransfer[[8]](#footnote-8).
* Smartphone apps and technology solutions can also enable vulnerable workers to provide direct feedback on their working conditions and access reliable information. This helps reduce risk when looking for work and helps companies increase transparency through their supply chain[[9]](#footnote-9).

Hence it can be said that big tech companies face many challenges in eliminating modern slavery from their supply chains, but they all report continuing commitment to doing that. To guarantee that its policies and programs include internationally recognized human rights standards, it works with industry organizations and multiple stakeholders on training and other modern slavery initiatives. It also forms strategic partnerships with organizations concerned with ending modern slavery to provide immediate direct support to potential victims.

**Third, the major technological and policy challenges that need to be overcome or at least mitigated to prevent modern slavery**

A greater focus on collaboration between all actors is a gateway to gradual change in the collective response to modern slavery where digital ICT can provide opportunities to change a step in tackling modern slavery: by preventing and identifying crimes, providing a redress mechanism for victims and supporting survivors, addressing data gaps, increasing data sharing efficiency leading to more effective use of resources and coordination among law enforcement, companies, government, and civil society.

However, these opportunities include barriers that limit the ability of technology firms and their platforms to access accurate information about contemporary slavery, as limited Internet access in countries of origin or transit impedes the effectiveness of technological solutions and the ability to engage and support vulnerable groups, such as migrants and refugees. Law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations often lack the technological solutions, skills, and resources to use to address slavery, especially since law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations often do not have sufficient budgets to hinder their response to reducing modern slavery. In addition to the lack of data and reports about existing or potential slavery incidents, the lack of information sharing also between countries or companies and organizations constitutes one of the most important challenges that impede the use of technology to prevent contemporary slavery at the local, regional, national, and international levels[[10]](#footnote-10).

Hence, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** affirms that technology can make a difference in how to deal with modern slavery, support victims and reduce crime, but it must be spread effectively and in accordance with human rights standards, and it is important to ensure youth participation and encourage strict regulation of abuse on social media and services Web-based monitoring of emerging trends in slavery and their reduction so that necessary protective measures are taken right on time manner. Maat recommends that: -

* Developing and establishing a database to provide information on human trafficking networks and gangs and ways to combat them.
* Implementing several mechanisms across all levels of the Big Tech supply chain to quickly detect and respond to reports of forced labor.
* Promoting education and public awareness through strategic advocacy, case reporting, and emergency humanitarian assistance to alleviate modern slavery.
* Developing solutions for better data collection, measurement, analysis, sharing, and transparency and will require training to ensure people have the skills to maximize the available tools.
* Mandatory reporting demands by Governments should continue to push more and more companies to take concrete action to prevent their technology from being used to facilitate any form of contemporary slavery.

1. 50 million people live under modern slavery, which is a fundamental violation of human rights, United Nations Center, September 12, 2022, link, <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2022/09/1110921> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME, January 2021, link, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Electronic Slavery Market to Sell Domestic Workers in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia Unveiled, New Gulf Website, October 31, 2019, Link<https://bit.ly/3iZc2Z7> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The impact of technology on contemporary slavery in the 21st century, Platform For Peace Humanity, 23 Aug.2020, link, <https://peacehumanity.org/2020/08/23/the-impact-of-technology-on-contemporary-slavery-in-the-21st-century/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. - Modern Slavery Exposed In Big Tech Supply Chains, INFORMED365, 27 Apr 2022, link, <https://informed365.com/modern-slavery-exposed-in-big-tech-supply-chains/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Modern Slavery Exposed In Big Tech Supply Chains, INFORMED365, 27 Apr 2022, link, <https://informed365.com/modern-slavery-exposed-in-big-tech-supply-chains/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The impact of technology on contemporary slavery in the 21st century, Platform For Peace Humanity, 23 Aug.2020, link, <https://peacehumanity.org/2020/08/23/the-impact-of-technology-on-contemporary-slavery-in-the-21st-century/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The role of digital technology in tackling modern slavery , Wilton Park, link, <https://respect.international/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-role-of-digital-technology-in-tackling-modern-Wilton-Park-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The role of digital technology in tackling modern slavery , Wilton Park, link, <https://respect.international/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-role-of-digital-technology-in-tackling-modern-Wilton-Park-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)