

# Rehabilitation for Victims of Modern Slavery

## Expert Panel on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

1 December 2017, 11 a.m., Salle XXII, Palais des Nations



Young girl doing domestic work in Nepal. Photo: ILO/J. Maillard



Child soldiers, CAR. Photo: Gabriel Galwak/IRIN

*“They have had no control over their basic needs. They have been dependent on those who control and exploit them for the basic thing they need for survival: food, clothing, shelter. They have not had the choice about whether they can go to the toilet or have a shower. Year after year this has an enormous impact on an individual’s sense of autonomy, self efficacy and ability to relate to, and trust others.”*

– Dr. Katy Robjant, clinical psychologist

### Background

The [United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery](#) will host an Expert Panel Discussion to mark the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery on 1 December 2017, in Geneva. The Panel will focus on the importance of rehabilitation to enable victims of modern slavery practices to integrate into society and end the cycle of abuse.

Slavery is not just an abomination of the past. Although enslavement is among the gravest and most comprehensive violations of human dignity, and although it has been universally prohibited by law,

still, in the year 2016, an estimated 40.3 million people worldwide were victims of modern slavery.<sup>1</sup> This figure is a loose estimation, because so much of modern slavery is hidden from sight. Victims are frequently enslaved precisely because they have been rendered vulnerable and invisible – by years, perhaps generations, of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and failure by States to protect them.

Psychological research has indicated that there are high levels of traumatic events experienced by victims of modern slavery across multiple contexts. The conditions in which the victim was held, the experiences that they went through during their enslavement, and the (lack of) support after release - all influence mental health.

Victims of modern-day slavery may suffer from physical trauma and damage. Brutal forms of punishment are used to control victims, including beatings, branding, starvation, and sexual violence. Modern-day slaves are often exposed to harsh and dangerous living and working conditions. As a result, victims may have scars, physical limitations, diseases, and other health related problems as a result of their treatment. Many survivors who have experienced abusive relationships with slave owners have difficulties trusting others, keeping themselves safe, and often become involved in other exploitative relationships once they have escaped the slavery situation.

Progress has been made in the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of modern slavery. However, millions remain in conditions of slavery, and an ever-increasing number are being pushed into modern slavery as a result of extreme poverty, deeply anchored discriminatory beliefs and patterns, as well as conflicts. Much still needs to be done.

## Objectives

- The panel will raise awareness of the suffering and violation of human dignity that continues to be perpetuated through modern-day slavery.
- The panel will emphasize the critical need for rehabilitation for victims, whose recovery is essential to breaking the cycle of inequality and eradicating slavery and slave-like practices. Every survivor is unique and has different needs.
- The panel will share the concrete experiences of grantees of the UN Slavery Fund, highlighting the vital role that rehabilitation and empowerment have had for victims around the world. Voices of former victims of slavery will be put forward to convey the seriousness of modern-day in particular its dehumanizing impact on victims.
- The panel will call for action. Given the scale and range of modern-day slavery, cooperation and coordination at the international level will be crucial to combatting these horrendous practices.

The event will be open to all Permanent Missions, civil society actors, rehabilitation practitioners and media.

The Expert Panel will be followed by an inter-active segment of questions and answers.

*Interpretation in English, French and Spanish will be provided.*

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<sup>1</sup> ILO: *Global estimates of modern slavery: Results and methodology* (Geneva, 2017).

## Panellists

- Ms. Peggy Hicks, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Ms. Nevena Vuckovic Sahovic, Chairperson of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Contemporary Slavery
- Ms. Renu Rajbhandari, medical expert and member of the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Contemporary Slavery
- Ms. Marcela Loaiza, former victim of sexual slavery and founder of Fundacion Marcela Loaiza, Colombia
- Mr. Suamhirs Piraino-Guzman, former victim of child sexual slavery and behavioural health specialist for the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking, USA
- Mr. Issa Kouyate, President, Maison de la Gare, Senegal
- Ms. Eileen Walsh, clinical psychologist, Helen Bamber Foundation, United Kingdom

## Information on the Fund and its activities:

The [United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery \(UNVFCFS – UN Slavery Fund\)](#) provides assistance each year to thousands of victims of contemporary forms of slavery. It does so by awarding annual grants to civil society organisations providing humanitarian, medical, psychological, legal, social, and financial aid to individuals whose human rights have been severely violated as a result of contemporary forms of slavery.

Since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1991 ([resolution 46/122](#)), the Fund has awarded more than four million dollars to 450 organizations providing rehabilitation and redress to tens of thousands of victims in all regions of the world. The Fund's sponsored activities are mainstreamed into OHCHR's work. Their impact is at the ground level and is achieved through a unique dynamic that brings together civil society actors, States' funding, independent human rights expertise (through the Fund's Board of Trustees) and victims' needs.

Apart from its unique **victim-centred approach**, the UN Slavery Fund has another distinctive quality: its **universality**. In 2017, the Fund is supporting [33 projects in 32 countries](#), for a total amount of US \$553,000. These projects provide direct assistance to nearly 10,000 victims of contemporary forms of slavery, in particular women and children.

[Beneficiaries](#) include victims of a wide range of types of contemporary forms of slavery. In 2017, 42% of the projects supported by the Fund provide assistance to victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour, 23% to victims of forced and bonded labour, 13% to victims of the worst forms of child labour, 7% to victims of early and forced marriage, 6% to victims of sexual exploitation, 3% victims of sexual slavery and 3% to traditional slavery. Nevertheless, reality shows that victims are often trapped in multiple forms of slavery.

For the period 2016-2019, the Board of the Fund agreed to sharpen the [Fund's focus](#) so as to: **i)** prioritize assistance to women and children, survivors of slavery in the context of conflict and humanitarian crises, including victims of child and forced marriage, **ii)** increase the average grant size (between \$15,000 and 30,000), and **iii)** link the Fund's work to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal #8.7 to "[t]ake immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking."

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