



The Unfinished Struggle to End Slavery

April 2021

On 22 May 1787, twelve devout men assembled at a printing shop in the City of London. Most were Quakers, but they were joined by several Anglicans, including the veteran anti-slavery campaigner, Granville Sharp, and the young Thomas Clarkson. Clarkson would devote his entire life to the cause. The twelve established themselves as the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. They recruited a young Yorkshire MP, William Wilberforce, to lead the House of Commons campaign. While significant progress in abolishing slavery has been made, their dream remains unfulfilled.

Talk of the abuses of slavery! Humbug! The thing itself is the essence of all abuse!
Harriet Beecher Stowe, US Christian abolitionist and author

Modern slavery remains a significant global problem. Recently, evidence has been reported in the media of the Chinese Government imposing forced labour on ethnic Uyghurs.

On 1 July 2020, the US Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce and Homeland Security issued a joint advisory to businesses with supply chain exposure to entities in China's Xinjiang region. The advisory warned of the risk of forced labour in the production of goods in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The advisory also warned there were credible reports that the Chinese Government had facilitated the mass transfer of Uyghurs and others from Xinjiang to factories across China, including under conditions of forced or involuntary labour.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute reported that at least 27 factories in nine Chinese provinces had used transferred labour since 2017. Those factories claim to be part of the supply chain of more than 80 global brands.

The US Department of Labor reported Uyghurs detained in camps and forced to labour in factories must endure dreadful conditions. In one internment camp in Kashgar, Xinjiang, Uyghur detainees work as forced labourers to produce textiles. They receive little pay, are not allowed to leave, and have limited or no communication with family members. If family communication and visits are permitted, they are heavily monitored or cut short. When not working, the Uyghur workers must learn Mandarin and undergo ideological indoctrination.

Media reports indicated the presence of forced labour in cotton production in the Xinjiang region of China. The allegation is that hundreds of thousands of people, including a large proportion of Uyghurs, have been forced to harvest cotton. Xinjiang cotton accounts for more than 80% of China's cotton and a fifth of global cotton production.

Investigations allege that agricultural products, cotton, textiles, apparel, footwear, electronics, food products, mining, chemicals, and medical equipment are high-risk products in China's production involving forced labour.

On 12 January 2021, the UK Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, told the UK House of Commons there was widespread use of forced labour of Uyghurs. He stated the evidence of the human rights violations were supported by a large, diverse and growing body of evidence. That includes:

- First-hand reports from diplomats who visit Xinjiang and the first-hand testimony from victims who have fled the region;
- There is satellite imagery showing the scale of the internment camps, the presence of factories inside them, and the destruction of mosques; and
- There are also extensive and credible third party reports from NGOs. The UN and other international experts also expressed grave concerns.

In response to these reports of forced labour in China, governments have been taking action to pressure the Chinese Government to end the practice. In Australia, independent Senator Rex Patrick has introduced the *Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced by Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020* into the Australian Parliament. The Bill aims to ban the importation of goods made through modern slavery in China.



The Justice and International Mission Cluster believes that there is a need for the Australian Parliament to adopt measures to address the importation of all goods and services produced by modern slavery wherever they originate from, not just China.

In 2018 the Australian Parliament passed the *Modern Slavery Act*. The law requires businesses and other entities with over \$100 million in revenue to produce a report stating what actions they are taking to address the risks of modern slavery in the goods and services they purchase. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has produced its first report under the law.

However, there is more the Australian Parliament could do to catch up with other governments' efforts to stamp out modern slavery. For example, Section 307 of the *US Tariff Act 1930* prohibits importing of goods produced in any foreign country by forced labour. Under the law, the US Customs and Border Protection agency can seize goods at the border to the US and refuse to allow them entry into the US where there is reasonable evidence the goods were produced with forced labour. By using their 'withhold release orders', the US Customs and Border Protection agency has been able to pressure companies to address modern slavery in goods they are producing or purchasing. In the most recent examples, the use of 'withhold release orders' has forced Malaysian factories producing rubber gloves to end the use of forced labour and debt bondage of workers in their factories.

The Australian Government could also follow the lead of the US, European and Indian Governments and make customs data transparent. Making key data about imported products publically available would improve Australian stakeholders' capacity to detect where Australian importers are dealing with suppliers where there is modern slavery. Transparency in customs data would have a deterrent impact on the risks Australian importers are willing to take in dealing with suppliers where there is a significant risk of human trafficking or forced labour being present, out of concern of reputational risk.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon Jason Wood MP

Assistant Minister for Customs, Community
Safety and Multicultural Affairs
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Senator The Hon. Marise Payne

Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

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Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern at the reports of human rights abuses of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities in China, including compelling them to provide forced labour to produce goods for export.
- Thank the Australian Government for the implementation of the *Modern Slavery Act*. However, given the reports of goods being produced by modern slavery entering Australia from China and elsewhere, request that the Australian Government take further action.
- Ask that the Australian Government follow the US and introduce a law that will allow Australian Border Force to seize goods before they enter Australia where there is strong evidence the goods have been produced through modern slavery.
- Ask that the Australian Government set up an investigative body with the Australian Border Force dedicated to investigating likely cases of the importation of goods produced with the involvement of modern slavery. Such a section could be modelled on the Forced Labor Division in the US Customs and Border Protection.
- Ask that the Australian Government take the necessary actions to allow importation data from the Australian Government's Integrated Cargo System (ICS) to be publicly accessible to help identify Australian importers that are sourcing goods from businesses overseas involved in modern slavery. Point out the United States, the EU, and India have made such data publically available with no significant negative impacts on businesses in their jurisdictions operating lawfully.