



## Set the oppressed free – Reforms to address modern slavery

October 2026

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,*

Luke 4:18

*"And what is that religion that sanctions, even by its silence, all that is embraced in the 'Peculiar Institution'? If there can be anything more diametrically opposed to the religion of Jesus than the working of this soul-killing system - which is as truly sanctioned by the religion of America as are her ministers and churches - we wish to be shown where it can be found."*

Sojourner Truth, born as Isabella Baumfree in 1797 in New York, endured the trauma of being sold into slavery multiple times and separated from her family. In 1826, she escaped slavery with her infant daughter. In 1843, she changed her name to Sojourner Truth, believing God had called her to spread a message of freedom and equality. As a travelling preacher, she advocated tirelessly for the abolition of slavery and women's rights, becoming known for her eloquence and compelling speeches.

Forced labour and human trafficking, known as modern slavery, remain significant global problems.

### Addressing modern slavery in the production of goods

The Commonwealth Government has announced that it will introduce a criminal offence to prosecute businesses found to have modern slavery in their supply chains and that failed to take action to prevent it. Such a measure will be highly ineffective. The Australian Federal Police cannot gather the cross-border evidence needed to carry out such prosecutions. Businesses will be rewarded for choosing to source from suppliers in jurisdictions where the government or law enforcement agencies support the use of modern slavery and will act to obstruct, disrupt or sabotage any attempts at a prosecution for modern slavery being present in a supply chain, such as China.

The presence of modern slavery in the supply chains of some high-risk goods and services imported into Australia is systemic. Police argue it is not possible to arrest and prosecute our way out of this problem. Instead, effective measures are those that will bring about cultural change amongst businesses so that they will not wilfully or recklessly import goods and services that have been produced with modern slavery. Measures that rely on a handful of criminal or civil legal actions in the courts are highly unlikely, on their own, to have the deterrence impact needed to bring about the required cultural shift. Businesses that purchase goods and services with a high risk of modern slavery need to shift from chasing the cheapest source for a given level of quality. Instead, the conditions of the people producing the goods and services need to be a meaningful factor in the business model when deciding who to buy from.

### Supporting survivors of modern slavery in Australia

*"I made two calls on the 131 AFP number and the frontline workers, they were not trained to take reports of modern slavery. They didn't really know what I was talking about. Then they forced me to the online form. However, I was overwhelmed by the situation. The web form wasn't that user-friendly. It's unrealistic to expect a victim to go online and do that. I was like, I don't even know where this web form lands, if someone's going to look at it or not."*

Survivor of modern slavery in Australia interviewed by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

The Australian Institute of Criminology has assessed how well the criminal justice system in Australia supports victims and survivors of modern slavery. They found that while the



criminal justice system had improved, there were still practical barriers to identifying and prosecuting cases of modern slavery. They also found that there are policies and practices to support survivors of modern slavery in accessing and navigating the criminal justice system, and that these supports have improved. However, these are not always used, and not all survivors are getting the support they need. This impacts survivors' ability to access support and to recover from the harms caused by their exploitation.

### What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

**The Hon Michelle Rowland MP**

Attorney-General

PO Box 6022

House of Representatives

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister



Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern that goods are being imported into Australia with modern slavery in their production.
- Welcome that the Government is willing to take action to address modern slavery in supply chains, but express concern that a criminal offence for police proving modern slavery is in the supply chain of a business will be ineffective. It will be very rare that such proof can be established.
- In addition, express concern that survivors of modern slavery in Australia need more support.
- Urge the Australian Government to:
  - Introduce an offence for a corporation that fails to have an adequate system to address modern slavery risks in its supply chains appropriate to the level of risk and the resources of the entity to address the risk. The offence should not require that the presence of modern slavery is proved in the supply chain.
  - Introduce high-risk declarations of goods and regions where there is a high risk of modern slavery. The declarations should be designed to guide businesses on where they need to place attention because, collectively, it has been established the businesses are not adequately addressing the risk of modern slavery being in the production of the product in question.
  - Introduce a mechanism modelled on *Part 6-4A Division 3 – Recovery of unpaid amounts* of the *Fair Work Act 2009*, to allow people who have been subjected to modern slavery to seek payment of wages they have been cheated out of.
  - Make it easier for survivors of modern slavery in Australia to report their situation.
  - Provide appropriate legal support to victims and survivors of modern slavery in Australia.
  - Ensure that police and prosecutors communicate properly with victims and survivors and limit what they ask from survivors during an investigation and prosecution.
  - Ensure that access to support for survivors of modern slavery in Australia is not dependent on the police assessing them as useful to a prosecution.
  - Introduce a Commonwealth compensation scheme for survivors of modern slavery in Australia.
  - Trial a place-based collaborative framework in which people with lived experience, police, health services, and community organisations work together to identify and respond to modern slavery.

Please send any replies you get to [jim@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:jim@victas.uca.org.au)