

THE CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

Speech delivered at Launch of CSJ Slavery in the UK Policy Review

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Speech

Thank you Iain and Gavin for your speeches. My name is Andrew Wallis and I am the founding Director of Unseen(UK), a charity committed to bringing safety, hope and choice to those who were formerly enslaved.

I was delighted and honoured to accept the CSJ's invitation to chair this policy review on slavery. Its launch is both timely and vital. In 2007 the UK celebrated the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and in doing so led the world to recognise: "that slavery was trafficking in human blood and tears, in misery and suffering and that it had to stop for the sake of justice and humanity".

Yet, here we are in 2011, with slavery rife amongst us. Whether we like it or not as a society, as individuals, we are in contact with slavery more often than we realise.

Do we stop and think about the slaves as our favourite chocolate bars are consumed by the millions? Or what about the vegetables or seafood we selected at the supermarkets; or the clothes worn? And what about the takeaways enjoyed on a Saturday night?

How about the car windscreen that is washed at the traffic lights or the child that sits begging on the street? Or what about where money is invested or who companies do business with or who travels on the planes, buses and trains?

Then there is the new domestic help. She helps deliver a fantastic dinner party, but never ever gets to go out on her own and apparently offers that *certain je ne sais quoi* when the wife's back is turned.

Then what about that joint that is smoked or the sex purchased, or what happens on the stag weekend in Krakow made somehow acceptable because it's not the UK? Then there's the pornography that is consumed in whatever media format we choose, even HD and 3D. Or the trip overseas where a holiday is no holiday for them and who came up with the phrase sex tourist anyway? Shouldn't they be called rape tourist?

Or there is the business trip with that certain extra room service and no questions asked. Catering for any tastes with no concern about their age – do anything as long as you leave them alive Or the trip to the lap dancing/strip club to entertain the clients? Or the exclusive entry to the VIP section of the nightclub where women (or girls) can be bought for the highest bid – cash preferably.

Or what about the military camps around the world – well soldiers have needs don't they and what happens on tour...but what if it was our daughters or sisters servicing their needs here in the UK?

Or what about the school children groomed and seduced by the flash car and gifts before being prostituted because what happens between Friday after school and Monday morning is none of our business, is it?

They say we are all joined by six degrees of separation from any other human being on the planet. In all of these scenarios we are in much closer contact with slaves either here in the UK or overseas. None of us have clean hands.

We often hear much about human rights. But for there to be rights we have to acknowledge there are wrongs. I accepted the offer of chairing this policy review because I passionately believe slavery is wrong.

This policy review will bring together all those who are involved in combatting slavery so we can actually achieve what our forbearers hoped for – an eradication of slavery. Two hundred years ago as a nation we led the world in saying: slavery is wrong, and we still aspire to that – to lead the world in combatting slavery and bringing justice and freedom to those who are enslaved, but I fear we no longer lead this fight.

From my perspective as director of unseen(uk) I see a very real willingness to combat slavery from the individual to NGO's, to corporates, to government, to statutory authorities. But there are real problems out there.

Let me paint a somewhat brutal picture which maybe is full of generalisations but in my opinion are painfully true and why we no longer lead the world in combatting slavery and freeing slaves. If we were gold standard once, we are now a somewhat tarnished bronze. This is not meant to offend but rather illustrate the scale of the problems we face in the UK when it comes to slavery.

As NGOs we're in danger of becoming our own worst enemies. In attempting to win the war we run the risk of losing sight of the survivors.

We squabble over funding, don't trust government or statutory authorities, known for carping and criticism, which, by the way, anyone can do, and when we don't get our way we throw our toys out of the pram, lose the argument and support. We must become united in working together; think strategically and long term rather than seeking our fleeting moment of glory. We must work collaboratively with others to bring about an end to slavery.

Within the statutory authorities, I have met fantastic men and women on the front line who when informed about slavery want to do everything within their power to help, to work collegiately with NGO's and be trained to do the right thing for survivors.

Yet they are hampered because their bosses either don't want to know, or because the success rate in solving these crimes is low and they would rather not participate than see marginal success as no one wants poor results, plus there is always a burglary to solve.

Or what about the people and the agency being asked to juggle decisions about both immigration and slave status simultaneously? The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing or even that we have a NRM and that they are targeted on the number of returns.

Then there are people/children in our prisons who have gone through the whole of the judicial system and no one, no agency, YOT, YJB, CPS, no lawyer, no judge has asked along the way, might this person be a victim of slavery?

Then businesses and financial institutions, whom I'm sure would not want to be associated with slavery, either directly or indirectly, who through their policies, practices or investments or more simply ignorance, can cause the enslavement of people in the UK and around the globe.

Then there is the media, always wanting the sensational, personal, graphic story because that's what sells, but at the same time continues the exploitation of the survivor. And academia who frequently confuse migration with slavery – they are not the same.

To the current state of legislation which is a “hodge podge” at best and effectively means it is nigh on impossible to prosecute someone for the crime of enslavement.

It is our collective failure to really grasp the issue. At worst, slavery is not a vote winner. Figures get thrown around that have no bearing on reality – we don't know how many people are enslaved. But that begs the question, how many slaves would be acceptable to the UK?

So no wonder slave masters flock to the UK to sell their commodity – human beings. It's a low risk, high profit business and in our globalised world, it's a business that follows demand.

This points the harsh spotlight on us as a society where we have to honestly acknowledge that we have as a society created a demand for slaves in the UK and abroad in 2011.

The truth is that, if there was no demand, there would be no slavery. If there was a wholesale rejection of slavery there would be no market for the slave masters to move into. Sadly, there is and as I alluded to at the start, a much closer brush with slavery with all of our lives than we would care to acknowledge.

This policy review is going to look at all the areas of slavery in the UK: investigation, prosecution, survivor care, legislation, media coverage and portrayal, business practice, investment policies, individuals' response and actions, academic study and demand.

My firm conviction is that collaborative working between all the stakeholders – NGO's, statutory authorities, government, individuals, business, media and academia is the **only** way to produce not only an evidence led review but also the only way that collectively as a society we can combat and eventually eradicate slavery within our nation.

Is it an ambitious aim – **yes**. But I like a challenge.

I want to finish with a short story which I hope brings home the reality of slavery in the UK – today.

Police were called to a takeaway shop in some non-descript northern town where they found a dead woman outside in the backyard, this didn't make any sense and an investigation ensued.

It was discovered that she had been trafficked into the UK to work in the shop and clean for the owners. There was no obvious sleeping place in the shop or residential quarters for her when the police looked, it was only when they went back outside they realised the iron bedframe in the yard, exposed to all the elements is where she was living. She was found dead, frozen to death by the back door of the shop, trying to get in to avoid the cold.

When you are a slave master you can always get another commodity, another slave, if the current one breaks down, contracts HIV, becomes too old, dies. The price of a slave is the cheapest it has ever been in history. Availability of slaves, although illicit, is limitless and for many in our country, be they UK nationals or from overseas they have discovered to their horror that they are slaves and they echo the words of a slave from the cotton fields of America in another century:

"I didn't know I was a slave until I found out I couldn't do the things I wanted."

The CSJ Policy review on slavery wants to deliver a policy that brings about real change, sets slaves free and I as chair invite you all to contribute and collaborate with us in both the process and then in the implementation and help us finally eradicate slavery in the UK.

ENDS

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent not-for-profit thinktank set up by Rt Hon
Iain Duncan Smith MP, to advance the education of the public in the subject of social justice
and to promote the role of the voluntary sector.

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