

## What is Modern Day Slavery?

### **Introduction**

The right to be free from enslavement in its many forms is one of the most fundamental human rights; one that is carefully stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and in domestic legislation in the UK and the majority of the world. Yet slavery continues to exist in modern society. With a host of international, regional and domestic laws in place to combat slavery, the expectation is that slavery should be a dead or dying practice, but in reality, there are tens of millions of men, women and children in different forms of slavery all around the world including an estimated 13,000 individuals in the UK today.

As such there can be no better topic for the Jewish community to explore and act upon during Human Rights Shabbat 5777.

### **What is Modern Day Slavery?**

Although the word slavery conjures up historical images of Biblical slaves in Egypt before the Exodus, or the trans-Atlantic slave trade in colonial America and the British Empire, enslavement exists today in many forms. Modern slavery may not always involve shackles and chains, but there are actually more slaves today than at any point in human history. You can read the factsheets and issue specific background papers to learn more.

Someone is in slavery if:

- They are forced to work - through mental or physical threat;
- They are owned or controlled by an 'employer', usually through mental or physical abuse or the threat of abuse;
- They are dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property';
- They are physically constrained or have restrictions placed on his/her freedom of movement.

## **Slavery in the United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom played a large part in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it was also one of the first countries to take steps against the trading of people with the passage of the Slave Trade Acts of 1807 and 1827, which prohibited British ships from being involved with the slave trade, and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which abolished slavery throughout the British Empire. In spite of these early measures and more recent legislative prohibitions, slavery is still a problem in the United Kingdom.

In 2015, the British Parliament passed the Modern Slavery Act. Provisions within the Act included an increase in maximum sentences for trafficking offenders, assured protection for victims and the establishment of the UK's first ever Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

As a result of the Act, the number of identified victims has risen by 40% and there have been more prosecutions for slavery offences. However, some have been critical of the Act. For example, while big businesses are supposed to examine their supply chains, there are no repercussions for failing to do so. Moreover, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Kevin Hyland has stated that there are ***“too many gaps in the system for victims to fall through”***.

### **Why we are concerned?**

The foundational narrative of the Jewish people is one of a people led from slavery to freedom. We believe that the UK Jewish community can and should encourage the promotion and protection of human rights for those who are not free and who still suffer under modern slavery.

### **What we are doing?**

You can have a look through our other resources in this pack to read about some of the specific areas we are campaigning for change in. We work across Jewish denominations in schools, youth movements and Synagogues to get the Jewish community engaged on this issue.

Thank you for taking part in Human Rights Shabbat 5777 – the biggest one that René Cassin has ever run, and please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions about the resources at [info@renecassin.org](mailto:info@renecassin.org)