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Activists Hail Slavery Pledge Inclusion in New U.N. Development Goals

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The decision to include a pledge to eradicate slavery at the heart of a new global development pact is a major victory but there is a long way to go, campaigners against trafficking and slavery said on Monday. Although slavery is illegal in every country, almost 36 million people are enslaved worldwide, the Walk Free Foundation estimates. They include girls trafficked to brothels, people forced into manual labor and victims of debt bondage.

The 193 United Nations member states agreed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on Sunday which will shape development and poverty eradication efforts for the next 15 years, replacing eight Millennium Development Goals.

"You can't end poverty without ending slavery - it's fundamental," said child slave turned anti-slavery campaigner James Kofi Annan.

"Human trafficking and human slavery is a catastrophe. It's something that is eating into the productivity of the human race and has a negative impact on economies around the world."

Aidan McQuade, director of campaign group Anti-Slavery International, said he was delighted to see that ending slavery was finally part of the development agenda - "a place it should have been a long time ago".

"Currently you have (millions of) people whose labor is not being used for either the benefit of themselves or their families," he said.

"If they start working for themselves and their families instead of enriching some slave holder there will be a disproportionate impact upon poverty compared to other interventions that could be made."

The SDG target calls for immediate measures "to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor".

The explicit mention of modern slavery and human trafficking in the text was confirmed only late in the day after long negotiations.

Campaigners say countries of major concern include India, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Thailand and Mauritania.

McQuade said there should be greater discussion on how trade, aid, migration and diplomacy can affect slavery.

"Countries promulgating laws which allow individuals to enslave others should be held to account in international criminal courts and diplomatically as well," he added.

LOSS OF REMITTANCES

Britain's anti-slavery commissioner, Kevin Hyland, said modern slavery had a devastating impact not only on individuals but also on human development.

"It impedes health, economic growth, rule of law, women's empowerment and lifetime prospects for youth. It results in a huge loss of remittances to developing countries," he added.

"Remittance flows are taken from victims, who are forced to pay off debts, and become profits for the criminals."

Hyland said businesses had a vital role to play in ensuring their supply chains were not tainted by slavery.

He also said that the current record level of displacement - caused partly by protracted conflicts in Syria and Iraq - made trafficking and slavery more likely.

There must be closer high-level cooperation between source, transit and destination countries in the slavery chain, and efforts to tackle slavery need to focus on issues like poverty, vulnerability, social exclusion and rule of law, he said.

Annan, who runs a charity in Ghana which saves child slaves working in the fishing industry on Lake Volta, said more than 90 percent of the 1,200 children rescued there so far were from families living on less than \$1 a day.

The SDGs aim to eradicate hunger and extreme poverty, reduce inequality within and between states, achieve gender equality, improve water management and ensure action to combat climate change.

World leaders will meet in September at the United Nations headquarters in New York to adopt the new development agenda.

Pope Francis, who has made the fight against slavery and trafficking a key priority, will address the United Nations before the summit.

By Reuters, 1 day 7 hours ago



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