



How business and parliamentarians can work more closely together to combat human trafficking

*Presentation to Parliamentarians Against Human Trafficking London Seminar
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Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great honour to be here with you. I have much appreciated being part of an excellent seminar today, listening to the various viewpoints of both parliamentarians and other experts on the front line combatting human trafficking. I have learnt a lot.

I particularly want to applaud the work of you parliamentarians from across Europe who are doing great things spreading the word about human trafficking amongst your colleagues and beyond in your respective countries. Especially, however, I want to acknowledge the work of Anthony Steen who is very much the force behind the Human Trafficking Foundation and the current seminar and it was he who originally persuaded me to look at this whole area. And I have to admit that it becomes like a narcotic. Once you look at this pernicious and dreadful stain on our society in detail and you know you can make a difference, you cannot walk away.

But one of the messages that I have heard today is that whatever is being done, and there is much, we can do a lot more, particularly in the private sector and that is where, I hope, COBCOE has a very serious role to play.

Let me first introduce you to COBCOE briefly. We were founded in 1973 and today we represent 41 different British chambers of commerce operating in 38 countries across Europe. Between us we speak for about 10,000 businesses and we have member chambers in many of the key jurisdictions that give the greatest concern in the context of human trafficking, including the Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania. We have also been instrumental in setting up British Business Worldwide, which is the first cooperative alliance between British business organisations around the world. Currently this alliance comprises COBCOE, British American Business, the UK India Business Council, the China-Britain Business Council and BritLan, the British Chambers in Latin America, plus the British chambers or business groups in Southern Africa, Egypt, Dubai, Japan, Korea and Australia and I hope there will be more joining us soon. This is a tremendous network across the world where we learn from each other and look for opportunities to work together.

Some years ago already COBCOE understood well that it was time for business to play a sensible role in the community. We have encouraged our member chambers to develop their own corporate social responsibility programmes, and in fact we now even give an annual award to the best chamber CSR programme. We have also created opportunities for our chambers to learn about CSR, but until very recently we had not set up a CSR programme ourselves. That has now changed and we have adopted two programmes, one of which being the campaign against human trafficking and the other supporting

young entrepreneurs, working closely with Youth Business International, one of HRH Prince Charles' charities. In both cases we have not just looked for opportunities to support good causes but instead found areas where we can play an active role providing practical help as a business organisation.

As you know, human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar business. It is estimated that there are 27 million slaves in the world and is a serious business (but hopefully not one of ours). COBCOE is currently working on developing a code of practice for its members which will require COBCOE chambers to act ethically and with integrity in the community at large. Hopefully this code will also be a model for our members to suggest to their membership.

In business altruism only goes so far. Good CSR is good business. Certainly human trafficking is bad for business, a terrible stain on a business's reputation. If you, as a business, are not using slave labour, directly or indirectly, and your competitors may be you will need to fight against those practices if for no other reason than to restrict unfair competition. But our interest goes beyond the Parliamentarians Against Human Trafficking, as valuable as the work is done by them, because many of our members are potentially involved both on the supply and demand sides, oftentimes without realising it, and I shall return to this shortly.

So where can we really help? Firstly, we certainly can give direct support for PAHT. We can provide information and feedback and we can create links which will directly assist PAHT. In fact we will be doing this already today. We should also look as to where we can provide, through our local chambers, language support for PAHT activities and we have already been exploring where we can provide direct assistance on the ground for events being run by PAHT outside of the UK. The campaign will have access to our network with good friends on the ground in often difficult areas. It would also be able to work through our British Business Worldwide network and beyond, where perhaps we can create links into the British chambers of commerce here in the UK or the Arab-British Chamber to give two examples. We can also give direct publicity to PAHT through our magazine, *Links*, which is circulated throughout Europe, both electronically and physically, as well as on our website, focusing not just on the organisation itself but also on the human trafficking problem.

Our second area of work will be in education. We can circulate information about human trafficking and publicise the problem through our website. You will see we have a section dedicated to this issue at www.cobcoe.eu/about/corporate-social-responsibility/parliamentarians-against-human-trafficking-paht/. But I am conscious of the fact that most of the business community lives in ignorance of the real problem. There can be two reasons for this. Firstly, as the English expression goes, the fish rots from the head. If the corporate culture accepts a certain approach to business then people, often working underneath the senior management, often do not realise that they are doing anything wrong. The classic example is a company importing goods from low cost production countries and driving very hard bargains where the senior management may at least have cause to suspect that the goods are being produced by indentured labour. So we need to educate middle-management to ensure that they understand the dangers of such an approach.

We also need to expose hidden infractions; hotels sub-contracting cleaning without pausing to ask questions and just selecting the most competitive bidder, or ethical businesses contracting out security or other services without understanding how they are being provided. Without being involved in the campaign against human trafficking, it is difficult to understand how pervasive this problem is and that, in fact, the industry is bigger than drug trafficking with profits estimated to exceed \$32 billion per year.

We need to raise awareness of the problem and this can be done in a number of ways. You will see, for example, on our website a link into www.slaveryfootprint.org which will tell you how many slaves you are currently employing. It is a sobering experience. But we are also looking to work with professionals who can provide training programmes which we can circulate around our membership and which they can incorporate into their best practice programmes.

In any event education in this area is about to change from being an optional extra to a requirement as the EU Human Trafficking Directive comes into force. In particular Article 18 requires each member state of the EU to educate society around it as to the dangers of human trafficking and we may also be able to assist governments as they develop those education programmes.

We also run regular events across Europe in all of our chambers. There is no reason why we cannot create platforms for interchange between MPs and business and law enforcement agencies and, I would like to suggest, current victims/survivors. Again we can use our magazine, *Links*, as well as our website to publicise the events and the problem and we are currently working with PAHT to secure a senior member of the British Government to write an article on this subject.

We should also be able to facilitate contacts with local Parliamentarians in various ways. Our members will have their own contacts with local MPs and perhaps can assist in expanding the group of engaged policy makers in the various countries across Europe. The chambers can act as a forum for exchange of ideas and contacts and in so doing can facilitate the engagement and buy-in from businesses.

This need for engagement is more important than you may realise. One of our problems as a business community is that Government will often choose to regulate society when it sees a problem, to dictate to the business community, appearing to just impose yet more red-tape rather than engage and persuade the community that action is needed. This is a mistake in our view. The campaign will lose many friends if the State does not take care to bring along the business community with it. If, on the other hand, we (or perhaps I should say you) get it right, there will be many voters in various countries across Europe ready to put pressure on their own policy makers to take action as well as voluntarily supporting the project. You may think that this is fanciful and of course there will be some businesses who can never be persuaded, or where self-interest is the only guideline but, large or small, many businesses are not like that and, when asked, they are ready to play their role in the greater community.

If we can engage with local business, there are major benefits for this campaign. To do this we will need to bring in and motivate our local member chambers using their websites and their publicity systems to get to their members, but there is much that can be done locally. Our members may be part of the supply chain (without knowing it). And the business community can help by identifying what that supply chain is. It may ready to sponsor various activities and there will be major companies within the membership (an example would be G4S) which are directly vulnerable, through their use of low cost labour, to, we would hope inadvertent, use of endangered labour.

But we can do more. A key problem in this area is what is known as re-victimisation. An individual is trafficked to another country, works under appalling conditions and is then either rescued or escapes, in both cases going back to his or her original country. But what will they do there? They have no skills and, in some societies, they will be ostracized. We need to talk to our members to see if they can provide alternative career paths. At the beginning, the work may be quite simple, but we should have the ability to provide alternative employment and ultimately to empower those victims to able to stand

on their own feet. Interestingly, our work with Youth Business International focuses very much on small, often start-up young entrepreneurs who then create employment opportunities for their contemporaries. There could even be scope for linking up YBI projects to provide this support on a local level.

Local businesses should also be working with law enforcement agencies, but not just looking for the primary offences. It is easy just to focus on human trafficking itself, but things are not often as simple as this. In many countries from where the victims originate, there is also an overlay of corruption that needs to be safe-guarded against and identified. Moreover proceeds of human trafficking are clearly in the category of money laundering if they are passed through the normal banking system. We need to be on the alert for this as well, again educating where necessary and understanding that the cash will flow into environments where laundering from such criminal activities is most easily accomplished.

Lastly we will also work together with the EU human trafficking unit looking with them, more holistically, at the problem and working solutions through with them.

So you see that there is much we can do even though it will not always be easy. What we can commit to is to work with you, the political community. There are amazing synergies and I am proud to be here today to show our willingness to work closely with you in partnership to combat this awful cancer in our society.

Thank you.

