

Statement from the Council for World Mission's Global Consultation on Modern-Day Slavery

17-19 November 2024, Bangkok

Organised by the Council for World Mission (CWM), the Global Consultation on Modern-Day Slavery, held in Bangkok from 17-19 November 2024, gathered theologians, activists, social workers, historians, and church leaders from across the world to address the grave atrocity of Modern-Day Slavery and urgently call on faith communities and society to action. The persistence of modern slavery—manifesting as human trafficking, forced labour, and other forms of exploitation—demands immediate and collective engagement. This global crisis is more than a tragedy; it is a moral failing that implicates us all.

We recognise that modern-day slavery is not merely a social issue, it is a deep spiritual and moral failure that contradicts our calling as disciples of Christ and our faith in the God of life. It is both a crime against humanity and a sin against God, demanding urgent reckoning. As followers of Christ, we are called to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person, acknowledging that all people are created in God's image, precious in God's sight, and must live in just and covenantal relationships with one another and with creation.

Amidst the ongoing dehumanization and exploitation that characterize modern day slavery, the Church carries a profound responsibility. To remain faithful to God's mission, the Church must not be silent but relentlessly work for justice, liberation, restoration and hope in a world dominated by life-denying forces.

It is with this realisation that we pledge to stand in solidarity with all individuals impacted by modern-day slavery and commit to eradicating this grave injustice in all its forms, until freedom, dignity, and safety are fully realized for everyone. This is our commitment and our calling as we seek to live out the teachings of Christ in today's world.

We affirm that:

- Slavery exists in various modern forms. Slavery persists in insidious forms such as forced labour, human trafficking, and systemic exploitation, often hidden beneath the surface of our societies. This persistence is a living reminder of the enduring legacy of historical injustices, including the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, which have mutated into more unseen yet equally destructive mechanisms that perpetuate human suffering. We are compelled, as followers of Christ, to recognize and confront these realities.
- We, as churches and individuals, have been complicit in perpetuating modern-day slavery. The historical and contemporary complicity of churches, institutions and individuals demands repentance. The very institutions meant to exemplify Christ's love have, at times, benefited from and sustained practices and systems that enable modern day slavery. Our economic habits and silent acceptance of unjust structures testify to this complicity. It is imperative that we acknowledge this painful truth and seek transformative action guided by the principles of justice, repentance and love.

- The foundation of dehumanizing structures is rooted in human greed and the pursuit of power. Modern slavery thrives within the frameworks of unjust economic systems, imperial legacies, and the commodification of human lives. These dehumanizing systems deepen economic inequalities and perpetuate gender discrimination, racial injustice, and caste-based oppression. As the Church, we must reject these forces and stand in prophetic opposition, affirming that every person is created in the *imago Dei* and endowed with inherent worth. Any practice that denies this fundamental truth stands in direct contradiction to both human rights and divine law. We proclaim that every act of exploitation is a grievous offense against God and must be eradicated.
- The vocation of the Church is to serve as a witness and an active agent of God's redemptive mission—a mission that seeks justice, liberation, and the restoration of the fullness of human dignity. The Church is called to uplift the oppressed and bear witness to God's vision of freedom, love, and abundant life for all. In this sacred mission, we are mandated to align ourselves with Christ's example of sacrificial love and unwavering advocacy for the vulnerable.
- The structures sustaining modern-day slavery are not just social, but systemic and institutionalised, rooted in policies, practices, and cultures that devalue human life and treat individuals as expendable commodities. We denounce these systems as antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We also recognize and commend those individuals, churches, and organizations that have courageously undertaken significant efforts toward justice. Their tireless work to transform and restore the lives of those impacted by modern slavery serves as a beacon of hope and an embodiment of faith in action. Their examples inspire and challenge us to deepen our own commitment.

We also recognize the incredible agency of survivors of modern-day slavery, whose resilience, strength, and determination to reclaim their lives – and the lives of others, serve as a powerful testament to the human spirit. Despite the physical and psychological trauma they have endured, many survivors have become advocates for change, using their voices to challenge systems of oppression and fight for justice. Their experiences and leadership are invaluable in the ongoing efforts to eradicate modern slavery.

Therefore, we call upon churches, individuals, missional, and social organizations to:

- Listen to the voices of those who have suffered. Survivors' testimonies must be central to any meaningful effort toward understanding and dismantling modern slavery. Their lived experiences are a prophetic call to action.
- Educate congregations and communities. Comprehensive educational programs are vital for illuminating the roots and realities of modern slavery and for mobilizing collective, informed action.
- Support and empower survivors. Provide tangible resources, advocacy, and safe spaces where those affected can find healing, restoration, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

- Forge alliances with other religious bodies and social movements. Collaborative partnerships are essential to create a unified, formidable front against modern-day slavery, amplifying efforts for systemic change and fostering solidarity.
- Live as people of hope who refuse to accept the current situation but who work towards the gospel promise of freedom and life for the enslaved and marginalised.

We demand that churches and faith-based organizations break free from their complicity and reclaim their prophetic voice. The time for passive acknowledgment has passed. We are called to active repentance, which involves not only sorrow for past failures but tangible action toward justice. We must join hands in solidarity, embodying the kingdom of God through our commitment to justice and compassion. The Church must become a sanctuary of liberation and a champion of human dignity, living out the radical love and justice taught by Christ. This call to action is not an option, it is an urgent and sacred mandate rooted in our shared faith and humanity.

With faith in God's justice and love, we pledge to stand in solidarity with all those affected by modern-day slavery until freedom, dignity, and safety are realized for every person. This is our commitment – and our calling – as we seek to live out the teachings of Christ and confront the injustices of our world with courage and conviction. Until freedom is for all, none are truly free.