



# XXXI BPW International Congress

17 – 21 November 2024

## Resolutions

### 6.1.4. External Resolution: Addressing Modern Slavery

Title of proposed resolution	Addressing Modern Slavery
Proposed by	BPW New Zealand
Seconded by	To be confirmed
Supported by	
Financial Impact	None

**MOTION:**

**Mindful** that modern slavery and worker exploitation is both a human tragedy and a growing organisational risk, rooted in poverty, discrimination and lack of social protection, and disruptive to fair competition between businesses.

**Aware** that women and children are disproportionately vulnerable to modern slavery. Modern slavery occurs in almost every country in the world, and cuts across ethnic, cultural, socio-economic status and religious lines.

**Acknowledging** existing BPW International policy:

- a) Sexual Slavery and Trafficking of Women and Girls (2002-5)
- b) Human Trafficking (2008-14)

**Mindful** of international mechanisms with reference to ending modern slavery and worker exploitation:

- United Nations Declaration of Human Rights
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- International Labour Standards on forced labour
- Commission on the Status of Women 68
- 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- Sustainable Development Goals, in particular 8.7

**Be it resolved:**

**That** BPW International and its Affiliates advocate that governments:

- a. introduce legislation requiring all businesses take action to prevent, mitigate or remedy any instances of modern slavery or worker exploitation in their domestic or international operations or supply chains;
- b. impose graduated levels of action and reporting requirements commensurate with the size and resources of the business; and
- c. require mandatory contract clauses to prevent Modern Slavery.



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### **RATIONALE FOR THE RESOLUTION:**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) advises that “forced labour and slavery are not a thing of the past.” Their definition of forced or compulsory labour is: “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.”

A 2022 report from produced by the ILO and others estimated that 50 million people were living in modern slavery in 2021, of which almost half were trapped in forced marriage. The report found that the number of people in modern slavery has risen significantly in the last five years.

Most victim-survivors of human trafficking are women (46%) or children (34%) (UN). Globally it is estimated that one in four victims of modern slavery are children (Unseen UK). More than half (52 per cent) of all forced labour and a quarter of all forced marriages can be found in upper-middle income or high-income countries.

63% of forced labour happens in the private economy, according to the ILO. International NGO, Walk Free, describes the products most at-risk of being produced with modern slavery (which G20 countries spend the most on) - Electronics, Garments, Palm oil, Solar panels and Textiles. Walk Free explains “Although the highest prevalence of forced labour is found in low-income countries, it is deeply connected to demand from higher-income countries. The production and movement of goods between countries ... creates complex and opaque supply chains, many of them tainted with forced labour.”

The UK and Australian Modern Slavery Acts require companies in all sectors to report on how they are addressing the risks of modern slavery in their direct operations and supply chains. Other countries with similar or part legislation are Canada, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Norway and the United States. A review of the Australian act found the positive impacts includes the establishment of over 4,000 modern slavery statements, increased dialogue between government, the business community, civil society groups, government agencies, and universities about the Act’s requirements, compliance trends and best practice reporting, and increased awareness about the link between modern slavery practices and global supply chains. We call on all countries to adopt modern slavery transparency and accountability legislation.

### **IMPLEMENTATION:**

BPW International and its Affiliates:

1. Increase awareness of the impact of modern slavery on women and children through all levels of political engagement.
2. Support and lobby governments to pass legislation.
3. Collaborate with other organisations and NGOs with expertise in modern slavery to support their work.