



## PREVENTION: FIGHTING SEX TRAFFICKING BY CURBING DEMAND FOR PROSTITUTION

A growing understanding of the nature of trafficking in persons has led to new innovations in addressing demand. Corporate standards for monitoring supply chains and government policies for eliminating trafficking from procurement practices are making new inroads in the fight against modern slavery. But the fact remains: if there were no demand for commercial sex, trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation would not exist in the form it does today. This reality underscores the need for continued strong efforts to reduce demand for sex trafficking by enacting policies and promoting cultural attitudes that reject the idea of paying for sex.

### **Policies to Address Demand for Commercial Sex**

Governments can lead both in practice and by example by implementing zero-tolerance policies for employees, uniformed servicemembers, and contractors paying for sex. If paying for sex is prohibited for those who work for, or do business with, a government, the ripple effects could be far-reaching. Through their massive procurement, governments have an impact on a wide range of private-sector actors, and policies banning the purchase of sex could in turn reach a significant part of the private sector as well.

At the same time, governments have the capacity to raise awareness of the subtle and brutal nature of this crime by requiring training of employees, contractors, and subcontractors about how individuals subjected to sex trafficking are victimized through coercion. Too often, trafficking victims are wrongly discounted as “consenting” adults. The use of violence to enslave trafficking victims is pervasive, but there are other more subtle forms of fraud and coercion that also prevent a person from escaping compelled servitude. A prostituted person may have initially consented, may believe that she or he is in love with her or his trafficker, may not self-identify as a victim, may not be operating in the vicinity of the pimp, or may have been away from the pimp’s

physical control with what seemed to be ample opportunity to ask for help or flee. None of these factors, taken alone or in sum, means that she or he is not a victim of a severe form of trafficking. Ensuring that these facts are part of the required training for every government employee and everyone who does business with or on behalf of a government is an important step in shifting attitudes about commercial sex.

### **Moral Leadership in the Future of this Struggle**

Strong policies are critical for ridding countries of all forms of modern slavery, but ultimately for encouraging a broader cultural shift in order to make meaningful progress in reducing demand for sex trafficking. This can only be achieved by rejecting long-held notions that regard commercial sex as a “boys will be boys” phenomenon, and instead sending the clear message that buying sex is wrong. Lawmakers have the power to craft effective anti-trafficking legislation, but they also have a responsibility to represent values that do not tolerate abuses of commercial sex. Business leaders need to cultivate a corporate culture that leaves behind outdated thinking that turns a blind eye to the sex trade, including the adoption of codes of conduct that prohibit purchasing sex. And leaders in civil society – from teachers to parents to ministers – must foster the belief that it is everyone’s responsibility to reduce the demand for sex trafficking. It is especially important to reach young men with a strong message of demand reduction to help them understand the exploitation involved with commercial sex and combat the glamorization of pimp culture.

It is every person’s individual responsibility to think about their contributions to trafficking. Laws and policies, partnerships and activism will continue to be critical to the struggle against modern slavery, but it will also be the day-to-day decisions of individual men and women that will bring an end to sex trafficking and carry forth a message of freedom for all.