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**"Numberless Diverse Acts of Courage and  
Belief": The Struggle Against Slavery in History  
and in the Present  
Transcript**

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## **‘Numberless Diverse Acts of Courage and Belief’: The Struggle against Slavery in History and in the Present**

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It is two years since, as Home Secretary, Theresa May navigated the Modern Slavery Act onto the UK's statute books. It is seven years since Baroness Lola Young's efforts made forced labour a criminal offence in the UK. It is 178 years since Thomas Clarkson established Anti-Slavery International to fight for an end to slavery outside the British Empire. It is 230 years since Clarkson, Sharp and the Quakers established the Committee for the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. It is over 1,500 years since St Patrick with his letter to the soldiers of Coroticus became the first Western leader to write a protest against the international trafficking of human beings. It is over 2,000 years since Spartacus' and Crixus' protest in arms against slavery was bloodily suppressed on the fields of Italy.

Slavery, like war, has been a disgraceful aspect of human society for most of human history. However, for almost 200 years, Anti-Slavery International has refused to accept that this bloody status quo should be allowed to persist. Instead we have wielded our pens, raised our voices and organised with our comrades across the world to end this. We do this to this day, and will continue for as long as it is necessary.

Often this role, this responsibility that we have taken upon ourselves, has been about as welcome as Banquo's ghost at the feast: the powerful tend not to enjoy being reminded of how they are implicated in the bloodshed and violence of slavery.

But this role remains vital to this day. Because in spite of the comforting myth that slavery is a thing of the past, the truth is that slavery is still very much a contemporary scourge, and one that indicts the national and international systems of law, trade, development, migration and employment that we as a human society have established.

### **Scale of the problem**

Within the UK it is estimated that between 10,000 and 13,000 people are enslaved at any time. That is but a fraction of the 21 million people estimated by the International Labour Organization to be in forced labour today. 5.5 million of those are children. Almost 19 million of those people are exploited by private individuals or enterprises and over 2 million by the state or rebel groups. It is estimated that 4.5 million are victims of forced sexual exploitation. Forced labour in the private economy generates US\$ 150 billion in illegal profits per year.

However, the overall number in slavery are certainly higher as the estimate of forced labour does not include those children who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation under the guise of marriage.

But while today there is a growing realisation that the story we used to tell ourselves, that slavery is a thing of the past, ended by Wilberforce and Lincoln in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, is at best only a partial truth, there is still a considerable way to go in formulating anything like a convincing response to this human rights abuse.

This evening I would like to draw some lessons from the historical and contemporary struggles against slavery to set out some of what I think are the core elements of a more robust response to slavery than we have hitherto seen. Towards that end I think it is important to begin by being clear about what we are talking about.

### **What is slavery?**

When we in Anti-Slavery International talk about "slavery" we use that word as an overarching term for the human rights abuses defined in international law, principally by the 1926 Slavery Convention, by the 1930 Forced Labour Convention, the 1956 Supplementary Convention on Slavery, the 2000 Palermo Protocol on trafficking, and the 2014 Forced Labour Protocol.

This range of international laws reflects the deepening understanding of and evolving responses to slavery and its related practices over the past 100 years. But a good working definition of contemporary slavery comes from the 1930 Forced Labour Convention, which defines forced labour as all work or service extracted under menace of penalty, for little or no pay, for which the person in question has not offered themselves voluntarily.

There are other important international laws related to this field, in particular on child labour, which affects another 168 million children, and on decent work. But it is vital to note that this question of, "What is slavery?" is not a matter for social scientific contentions of the sort so beloved by academics, such as I myself sometimes am. Rather it is something that has been established in international law as a result of considerable effort over the past 100 years to provide increasingly robust frameworks for the continuing struggle against slavery.

Remember how Lincoln had to struggle for a legal basis to end slavery in the United States? It is important to realise that we do not have to go back to that situation.

A further reason for this breadth of law in the international conventions is that contemporary slavery reflects a diversity of human experience: a life lived in bonded labour in Indian brick kilns is different in important respects from that of a Nepalese domestic worker in Lebanon, or somebody in chattel slavery in West Africa, or a “restavek” child slave in Haiti, or a forced labourer in American agriculture. Hence the responses to these problems must be nuanced and adjusted to the realities of those particular abuses in the time which they occur. For example, the 2014 Forced Labour Protocol was adopted in recognition that the realities of forced labour have changed since the original Convention was adopted in 1930.

Doubtless there will be other areas where there is a need for further extension and development of the international law, for example around the issue of forced child marriage, which is too frequently overlooked as an issue of child abuse and slavery because it is politically inconvenient, and those who are subjected to it are effectively silenced by the more powerful who benefit from it.

## **The causes of slavery**

But in spite of the spectrum of experiences of contemporary and historical slavery empirical studies conducted by Anti-Slavery International and others, indicate that slavery emerges at the conjunction of three common factors: individual vulnerability, usually, but not exclusively as a result of poverty – children, particularly girls can be more easily enslaved than adults because as children they are so vulnerable; social exclusion; and failure of rule of law.

The issue of social exclusion and discrimination is a fundamental one in slavery: when we look at historical slavery in the Americas we see that racism was both a cause, and a consequence, of that slavery. So it remains today: those who are enslaved tend to come from groups who the wider society sees as inferior or “other”. Today in Latin America many in forced labour are indigenous people. In Western Europe and South East Asia most people in slavery are migrant workers. In South Asia most people in slavery are Dalits, those who were hitherto known as Untouchables, or from other scheduled castes or minority groups. In Africa those enslaved often come from slave castes.

Arundhati Roy notes that, “*There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.*” Silence is facilitated by social exclusion and discrimination. And, as we have also seen in relation to forced child marriage, this inhibits the issue from becoming a political one: if slavery is being inflicted upon groups and individuals who are denied voice, or who the wider society simply does not like, then that wider community is more likely to tolerate the abuses if they see them and not raise their own voice to demand that governments do their jobs to stop the problem.

But slavery is very much a political problem. It is a failure of governments’ most fundamental responsibility: [establishing rule of law](#). Tom Bingham, one of the outstanding British jurists of the past 50 years, argued that human rights, including, of course, an absolute prohibition on slavery, must be at the heart of any credible system of rule of law.

Unfortunately, too often this is not the case. For example, in one study Anti-Slavery conducted of child labourers enslaved in the garment workshops of Delhi they told us how, despite plenty of good Indian laws against slavery and child labour, when the workshop owners fail to pay bribes to the police, the police come, arrest the children and hold them hostage, stopping work, until the bribes are paid. Elsewhere in India Dalits enslaved in brick kilns or agricultural labour find it next to impossible to obtain legal remedy for the situations in which they find themselves.

In other parts of the world rule of law is much more explicitly undermined. In Qatar there is the “kafalah” system. This is a so-called sponsorship system that ties workers to their employers to such an extent that even in the most abusive employment relationships, up to and including forced labour, the workers cannot change jobs or even go home. It is this system that underpins [the trafficking for forced labour of thousands of South Asian labourers for work on the infrastructure and venues for the World Cup in Qatar 2022](#). The International Trades Union Confederation estimates that about 4,000 workers will die in the preparation of these venues before a single ball is kicked. That could well make the Qatar World Cup into the bloodiest sporting event in history since, perhaps, the Caesars organised the spectacle of enslaved gladiators fighting to the death for the entertainment of the masses.

Kafalah is a cynical system to facilitate medieval levels of exploitation up to and including slavery across the Gulf States. It is also essentially the same system that the United Kingdom government has in place for migrant domestic workers. In spite of recent superficial reforms, the UK system for domestic workers’ visas still de facto legalises trafficking for forced domestic servitude. It does this by maintaining a dependency of the workers on their employers which means that any effort by those enslaved workers to escape their situation would result in impoverishment. That places in the hands of unscrupulous employers an enormously powerful threat to hold over the head of any vulnerable worker hoping to improve their own life and that of their family through hard

work.

The refusal to apply basic protections of rule of law to some within a society is sometimes deliberate, a tactic employed in order to obtain some aristocratic privilege over a particular group of people, such as was the case with the 19th Century US system of slavery, even when free labour and emancipation were more economically attractive. This remains the case with [India's caste-based apartheid today](#).

Sometimes the failure to provide basic rule of law protections are as a result of a mistake or oversight. Sometimes, as we are presently seeing with the British Government, it is as a result of ineptitude born of ignorance, ideology and xenophobia.

Here in the UK, for example, if a person from the European Union presents themselves to the authorities as a potential survivor of trafficking then there is a greater than 80% chance they will be recognised as such. However, if they come from outside the European Union then there is less than a 20% chance they will be recognised as such.

This sort of imbalance in decision making can only be the result of institutionalised discrimination, fed by the media and by political elites who should instead be sanctioning those who disgrace their offices by privileging their petty bigotries over their responsibilities under the law. With Brexit the risk increases of that discrimination being extended to thousands more of our fellow Europeans if they lose their rights to live and work in the UK.

## **Slavery and International Rule of Law**

But of course the question of rule of law is not merely a national issue but is also an international one.

If we cast our eyes about the world we can clearly see that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the question of international rule of law becomes an increasingly vital issue in the struggle against slavery. With globalisation the capacity of states to regulate business, as envisioned by classical economics, is progressively limited because too few states recognise that this responsibility now requires extraterritorial legislation to ensure the legal accountability of trans-national corporations, and of individual business executives who are running those corporations. Such legislation is also a central requirement in the struggle against contemporary slavery, particularly as businesses extend their operations into countries with limited rule of law and high levels of corruption.

But this question of international rule of law also touches much more directly on governments themselves and how they comport themselves, not just how they regulate international business.

I was assured in a recent meeting with Conservative parliamentarians that their commitment to the European Court of Human Rights is absolute. Which was a relief as the reports in the Daily Telegraph over Christmas and the New Year suggesting that Theresa May wished to withdraw from the Court sent shivers down my spine, and should send shivers down the spine of anyone concerned with human rights and in particular, with slavery.

Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which is administered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), recognises slavery as a human rights abuse.

Hence the Court has naturally dealt with a number cases relating to slavery over the years. These included the cases *Siliadin v France* in 2005, and *CN and V France* in 2012, which found that France had failed to make sufficient legislative and law enforcement provisions in domestic law to protect people from servitude. It also includes the 2010 case of *Rantsev v Cyprus and Russia*, which found those countries in breach of their positive obligations to protect people from human trafficking.

Those cases presented also included *C.N. v the United Kingdom* in 2012 which concerned allegations of domestic servitude by a Ugandan woman who complained that she had been forced into working as a live-in carer. The Court held that there had been a violation of the Convention, finding that that the legislative provisions in force in the United Kingdom at the relevant time had been "*inadequate to afford practical and effective protection against treatment contrary to Article 4 [prohibiting slavery and forced labour].*"

Each of these judgements advanced the protections of people at risk of slavery, including vulnerable British people at risk of trafficking across Europe, by deepening our collective understanding of the manifestations of modern slavery and how it should be combatted, and by compelling unaware or unwilling governments to act to uphold their responsibilities to protect human rights.

While there is much lovely rhetoric from international political leaders against slavery, these statements can sometimes belie the fact that I have already alluded to this evening, that slavery frequently occurs because of acts or omissions by governments that provide the opportunities for unscrupulous individuals to exploit the vulnerable.

For example, in 2016 Anti-Slavery made a submission to the ECtHR on a case from Greece where a group of Bangladeshi agricultural workers were, in our opinion, enslaved with the *de facto* collusion of the Greek authorities, a matter that the Greek Government had hitherto failed to resolve in spite of the entreaties of the

Greek Ombudsman.

While the judgment on this is still pending, without the Greek government being bound by the European Court of Human Rights there would be no further legal recourse for the workers to seek redress for their exploitation.

Hence obtaining adequate and enforceable human rights protections in national and international law and holding governments to account on these protections, is an essential element in the struggle against slavery. The Court of the Economic Community of West African States demonstrated this in 2008 when a case that we helped bring on behalf of a young woman called Hajiatou Mani resulted in a judgement of that court that found against the state of Niger for failing to protect its citizens from slavery. The effect of that judgement was not just compensation for Hajiatou but also the self-liberation of thousands more enslaved people across West Africa who were made aware of their rights by the judgement.

Where such rule of law protections are absent then the ground is all the more fertile for slavery to flourish.

We must remember that just because the UK has passed the Modern Slavery Act this does not mean that the UK's anti-trafficking regime has been perfected. The unintended consequences of other laws and policies, such as the introduction of the offence of illegal working in UK's the most recent immigration act, can threaten to undermine much of the good regarding victim identification and protection that the earlier act achieved.

In addition, the UK's withdrawal from the European Court of Human Rights would represent a repudiation by this country of the ideals of international rule of law that insist that states cannot do simply as they please but must be held to account by some internationally agreed standards, particularly in relation to human rights, which are the most basic acceptable standards of treating fellow human beings. Why, in future should a state like France, or Cyprus, or Niger allow itself to be held accountable by an international court on slavery or other human rights issues if the UK has asserted so graphically that it believes itself to be above such things?

In other words, Prime Minister May can either be a world leader against slavery, or she could be the leader who withdraws her country from the European Court of Human Rights. She cannot be both.

### **Lesson from history: part one**

The history of the struggle against slavery, as with the rest of the struggle for human rights, and the rest of history, is sometimes a messy and fraught affair, filled with petty rivalries, personal jealousies and self-serving accounts. And because, given the nature of slavery, its history is quite a personal story. People are not enslaved by poverty or drugs or some impersonal force: human beings do this to other human beings.

The diversity of personal perspectives means that there is inevitably a diversity of historical narratives. This is accentuated in the history of the struggle against slavery by the fact that there is a plurality of historical slavery experiences just as there are a plurality of contemporary experiences: for example, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and that of the Americas was different in significant respects to the trafficking from East Africa to Asia, to the indigenous forms of slavery and slavery-like practices, such as serfdom, that were present in Europe and other parts of the world.

Memory can be self-serving as can be the official versions of history. So surveying the history of this struggle can be confusing. Alongside the immense, and immensely troubling, accounts of the experiences of people in slavery, there are also propagandistic accounts of the benefits of slavery for enslaved people. Also, just considering the anti-slavery struggle throughout history, there were inevitable clashes between the leading anti-slavery figures. This resulted in such unedifying spectacles as the efforts by the sons of William Wilberforce to try to write the monumental figure of Thomas Clarkson out of history, or the efforts of Salmon Chase, the US Treasury Secretary during the Civil War, to organise a coup d'état against Lincoln. Even further back, some historians discern a dispute between Spartacus and Crixus at the height of the Gladiator War.

Nevertheless, the critical interrogation of history and society can be a source of understanding and learning. The former French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was once asked if anything could ever be said with certainty about the First World War given all the vast and bloody confusion that it entailed. "Yes", he said. "No one can ever say Belgium invaded Germany."

Such hard facts may be rare enough in history, and indeed in any aspect of life, but it is important to try to seek them out because they can help us discern what worked, what didn't work and why.

And, at least as importantly, by undertaking the process of thinking critically about history, of refusing to blindly accept the propaganda of the powerful or the official versions of the winners, we can carefully consider life and society, which in turn can provide a basis for developing our own citizenship and our capacity to take action for justice.

I think there are a number of hard truths that can be discerned from contemplation of the historical and contemporary struggles against slavery.

The first thing that emerges for me from consideration of the diversity of contemporary and historical anti-slavery struggles is that in any given age there are no shortage of people who feel that slavery is wrong. But, as Batman teaches us, it is not what we feel, but what we do, that defines us.

## **Wilberforce and Jefferson**

To this day political figures across the globe covet the title “the new Wilberforce”, in recognition of the towering role that he played in efforts to bring the trans-Atlantic slave trade to an end. But anyone who dips their toe into the slavery debate today with dreams of future glory should be aware, that if they lack the necessary moral and political courage, they may become merely “a new Jefferson”.

Thomas Jefferson was one of the great geniuses of his age and a declared opponent of slavery. Some of his writings on the subject were described by contemporaries such as John Adams, the United States’ second president, as being more valuable than diamonds in the anti-slavery cause. And yet the vision of the American Republic that he offered was impossible without slavery, and as President he did nothing to end slavery save for a mealy mouthed assertion that it was a task for later generations.

That argument may have comforted him as he sat in his study on his Monticello plantation in Virginia overseeing his own enslaved children. But it was not an argument which impressed Jefferson’s contemporary Alexander Hamilton, who sought, as the United States’ first treasury secretary, to put his anti-slavery convictions into practice by establishing an economic system that would reward free labour over slavery in the hope that that would erode the slave economy and hence end the brutal system.

While that did not directly bring an end to slavery in the United States the economic system Hamilton put in place did ultimately provide the North, under Lincoln, with the economic capacity to crush the South and obtain the legal abolition of slavery half a century after Hamilton’s own death: if Lincoln is the Father of Emancipation in the United States, I would argue that Hamilton is its Grandfather.

So in spite of his incredible gifts Jefferson did not confront the fundamental systems and institutions of slavery when he had the most power to do so. And across the world we see that still.

## **The Mediterranean Crisis**

The biggest single increase in the risks of human trafficking in Europe over the past two years has emerged from Europe’s largely inadequate and inhumane response to the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. This has rendered vulnerable to exploitation and slavery thousands who are desperately seeking escape from war and a decent life for their families.

As far back as 2006 Anti-Slavery International identified how people trafficked into Western Europe often entered perfectly legally, but then had their migration status made irregular by their traffickers. This increased the power and control that the traffickers had over them. The corollary of this is that if a person’s migration status is already irregular they are already vastly more vulnerable to enslavement than they would be if their status was regular. Irregular migration status reduces the options for protection and support that exploited people can seek, as doing so could result in their deportation. And, if they risked being deported back to a place where their lives and those of their families would be at risk, then their dependency on their traffickers becomes all the more acute.

So the absence of a comprehensive approach to the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, particularly the absence of safe migration options for vulnerable people fleeing war has been the single greatest factor to increase the risks of human trafficking in Europe over the past two years

It is true that the UK’s humanitarian response in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey has been both imaginative and impressive. But the proximity of the Middle East to Europe means that a traditional humanitarian response to the crisis, one that is focused substantially on the immediate theatres of war, can only be partial. People will not accept confinement to the poverty of a refugee camp if there is the prospect of a better life just beyond the horizon. Hence Europe and the world must develop a response to this challenge that incorporates safe migration away from the war zone and economic aid to provide employment opportunities for refugees in the region, as well as basic camp management, health and nutrition for refugees.

The Dubs’ Scheme on the resettlement of unaccompanied minors has been a small beacon of humanity in amongst this mess, providing safety and protection to children who would otherwise be the most vulnerable to trafficking. Nevertheless, by some peculiar stretch of logic, the UK government now suggests that this scheme, which protects children at risk of trafficking by giving them a safe migration option, “provides opportunities for people traffickers”.

It will perhaps be a matter for comment by some future historians that at this shameful period of European history some of the most vocal European leaders on the issue of slavery have been noticeably negative with

regard to the formulation of an effective Pan-European response to this refugee crisis. It is this absence that increases the risks of trafficking, not Alf Dubs' honourable scheme which instead reflects the very greatest British traditions of practical humanity and human rights.

Let us be clear: an important element in the international struggle against slavery must be attention to the need for safe migration. When xenophobia and prejudice are allowed to poison the political environment against migrants then the struggle against slavery is betrayed and the opportunities for violence and exploitation are increased.

There is hypocrisy in how migrant workers are treated internationally. On one hand we, as an international community, too often tolerate circumstance of injustice and poverty which compel them to migrate. We will then go so far sometimes to recognise the importance of remittances from these workers towards the development of their countries and reducing the poverty of their families. More rarely do we recognise the enormous benefits and enrichments that immigrants bring to our societies in terms of economic growth, culinary diversity, or musical and cultural vibrancy, to name but a few. But the world still fails to ensure safe migration. And now we continue to stand idly by as we witness the carnage off our southern European shores because of a wholesale failure of political courage in addressing this issue and facing down the bigots for whom everything unknown is a source of fear.

### **Lessons from history: part two**

Perhaps it is another hard lesson of history: that when the moral courage of political leaders fails in the face of prejudice and vested interests, it is almost always the vulnerable who are the ones to pay in the bloody routine of violence that ensues. So here is another truth from history. It is not rhetoric but moral courage that defines leadership and shapes the history of the times.

Certainly the struggle against slavery does not lack displays of every manifestation of courage known to humanity. I was at the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool a while ago and I saw a poster there commemorating the struggle against slavery and the transatlantic slave trade: it said *"Remember not that we were enslaved, but that we fought"*.

The historian David Richardson notes how insurrections on the slave ships so disrupted the trade that they had the effect of saving the lives and liberty of tens of thousands of others in Africa. Former slaves such as Equiano, Cogoano, Nat Turner, Sam Sharpe and Nanny of the Maroons became powerful voices in the struggle to end slavery and the trans-Atlantic trade. And in the middle of the Nineteenth Century the actions of the black regiments of the Union Army, such as the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup>, and of abolitionists like Fredrick Douglass were critical in directly destroying the systems of slavery in the American South, and their courage and influence inspired Abraham Lincoln to become the radical abolitionist that history remembers.

It remains the case today that those affected by slavery are amongst the most active in fighting against it, from Africa to Asia to the Americas, and to this city where overseas domestic workers seek to help others to break the bonds of slavery that, regrettably, the British government has failed to adequately address.

However, the activists who risk life and limb to end contemporary slavery across the globe know that few today beyond their own directly affected communities are remotely interested in trying to end these modern forms of slavery in spite of their rhetoric. They are simply not prepared to confront the vested interests who profit from contemporary slavery, and pay the personal or political price that genuine commitment demands.

Unlike previous struggles against aspects of slavery or more recent struggles to end, for example, apartheid in South Africa, or to advance the peace process in the North of Ireland, the contemporary efforts of indigenous campaigners against slavery are very poorly supported by international efforts.

As well as migration, there is very limited discussion on how policy on international aid, trade, or diplomacy should be shaped to support local anti-slavery activists. There is little discussion on how to reshape the international political economy away from one where unscrupulous political and business leaders are allowed to develop competitive advantage through their facilitation of, or use of, forced labour and slavery. And, let us be frank, with the impending threat of Brexit likely to reduce the UK to a middle-weight economic power desperate for new trade deals to replace the one it seems intent on throwing away with the world's largest single market, the UK is not likely to be the nation to lead to a new process to establish more ethical trade across the globe. It will rather more likely be reduced to the role of abject supplicant, accepting anything that Trump's America or Modi's India deigns to offer.

### **Caste and slavery**

It is perhaps just as well for the UK as it seeks its new trade deal with India that the rest of the world seems so ignorant of the issue of caste discrimination in South Asia. The system of apartheid that this imposes on over

300 million people not only undermines the very concepts of rule of law and democracy in South Asia, it also provides the social exclusion vital to establish a population who can be enslaved with impunity.

This provides huge benefits to powerful vested interests across South Asia. But we in the Northern hemisphere also benefit. So extensive still is the use of the forced labour of girls and young women in garment manufacture in southern India, not to mention the forced labour, including forced child labour, in cotton production in Uzbekistan and other parts of central Asia, that the probability is that every one of us in this room is wearing at least one garment that is tainted with contemporary slavery.

Just to give one illustration of what that means in human terms: [In the course of a piece of research Anti-Slavery International conducted into the forced labour of girls and young women in the garment sector of the state of Tamil Nadu in Southern India](#) we spoke to the mother of one young 20 year old woman. She described visiting her daughter:

*"I spoke to her in a room provided for visitors", she said, "because visitors are not allowed to go inside the mill or hostel. My daughter told me that she was suffering with fever and vomiting often. ...I met with the manager and requested him to give leave to my daughter because she was unwell. I told him that I would send my daughter back once she was better. But the manager refused saying that there was a shortage of workers therefore they cannot grant leave. He also assured me that they would take care of my daughter and asked me not to worry."*

A week later she received a call to say now she could collect her daughter. She was dead.

Just as enslaved people were worked to death on the plantations of the US South in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries so too are they today worked to death in the garment factories of Southern India, the fishing boats of Thailand that help supply us with cheap prawns for our dinner plates, on the World Cup building sites of Qatar and the rest of the Gulf, in agricultural fields from West Africa to North America, and in the servants' quarters of every major city of the world.

## **Slavery and complexity**

A further point that emerges from consideration of historical and contemporary slavery is that there is no silver bullet to end slavery.

I think this is one of the key lessons of the history of the anti-slavery movement. When Anti-Slavery International's antecedents in the Committee for the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was established in 1787, they believed that the ending of the slave trade would inevitably lead to the ending of slavery. It was certainly an important milestone but additional effort was necessary until chattel slavery was abolished in the British Empire. But even then slavery transmuted into different forms: bonded labour was still tolerated in British India and now in independent India and Pakistan. Indentured labour became a feature of British colonialism post-1839.

In the United States there was a similar approach to the eradication of slavery. Some believed that confining of slavery to the US South would ultimately lead to it dying out naturally. But in the end a devastating civil war was necessary. And again slavery transmuted first into exploitation and segregation, and then into a variety of new forms affecting vulnerable workers in the unpoliced parts of the economy.

So slavery remains with us today, as I mentioned, affecting a minimum of 21 million people across the world. Whatever magic bullets have been fired at the problem they have failed to stop it.

Treason doth never prosper. What's the reason? For if it prosper none dare call it treason. The same is the case with slavery. It prospers still but under different names, such as the overseas domestic worker visa in the UK, or the Kafala system in the Gulf. In truth there are so many people in slavery because for much of the world it is still, for all intents and purposes, legal.

We therefore need to conceive of a much broader based approach to dealing with contemporary slavery: complex problems generally require sophisticated solutions. This is definitely the case with slavery. It is a crime, but it needs more than a criminal justice approach to counteract. As I stated earlier, the anti-slavery struggle, if it is to be successful, must become a centrepiece of diplomacy, and policy and practice related to migration, international aid and trade.

Specifically, national and international systems of rule of law, which protect the human rights of all, must be established and enforced. These must be administered without fear or favour by a sufficient number of properly trained judges, who are supported by a similarly professional police force so as to ensure that the promise of the laws to protect is not an empty one.

Furthermore, discrimination must be prohibited, and states, businesses and civil society must take meaningful



measures to eradicate dehumanising and discriminatory practices from every section of society, and to ensure true equality before the law.

Those states that have not done so must legislate to criminalise all forms of slavery and to protect individuals from slavery. States must also advance access to decent work and pay particular attention to the specific needs of disadvantaged groups or individuals, such as women, children, migrants, people affected by disability, and people affected by caste discrimination, to achieve equal access and treatment. Furthermore, immigration law and policy which maintains or increases an individuals' vulnerability to exploitation and slavery must be prohibited.

Measures must be enacted to uphold the rights of children and protect them from child labour and enslavement. All nations must put in place, and implement, laws, policies and effective law enforcement to bring all forms of forced marriage, in particular forced child marriage, to an end. And all nations must ensure universal access to quality and appropriate education up to the age of 18, particularly for girls, for groups vulnerable to slavery, and for communities where child labour is endemic. Our work in Niger, for example, has shown how access to education can help to break the bonds of slavery across generations.

Some states may protest that they would have difficulty doing all this. Perhaps so. But they can start, and if they guarantee freedom of association for workers and human rights activists they will find willing allies in this endeavour.

It is essential for businesses to engage in this struggle in common cause with trades unions and human rights activists. Full transparency of national and international business supply chains must be established and enforced to identify where risks of slavery, forced and child labour are highest and to help identify and expose the causes of these risks. Businesses must not become implicit in trade that allows states to benefit from shoddy protections for the human rights of workers. Indeed, goods tainted by slavery, forced and child labour should be denied access to markets, as President Obama asserted when he signed the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act into law last year. This adds a direct commercial imperative to the moral imperative for businesses to address the issues of slavery in their supply chains.

By adopting a broader response to slavery there would begin to be a real prospect for those most discriminated against and most vulnerable to slavery, to begin to envisage a life of peace and prosperity for themselves and their families. Such an approach would also offer a route out of poverty for their countries rather than the continued violence of forced labour and poverty that describes their present, not to mention the risks to their futures.

Hence the struggle to end slavery should become a central feature of aid and development policy and practice, something that we in Anti-Slavery have been urging should happen since 2007. The UK Department for International Development seems to be beginning this process, and there is a long way to go in an effort that must ultimately encompass non-governmental as well as governmental agencies. Without such consideration there is a significant risk that anti-poverty interventions either relatively or absolutely exacerbate the position of the most vulnerable groups in those communities.

For example, in 2005 our colleagues in the Niger anti-slavery organisation Timidria identified that slaves were being used in some of the food for work programmes which had been set up in response to the West African famine of the time. The way this worked was that slave masters would send those they had enslaved to toil all day on the programmes and on their return they would confiscate the ration cards they had been given in payment for their work.

Now I don't want to be glib about this. I worked in humanitarian response for many years and deeply appreciate what a difficult and vital role it is. Without exposure to the institutions of contemporary slavery I am sure I would have made a similar mistake, and indeed probably did in other parts of the world. My point is that a basic question that development and humanitarian professionals should ask is, "How can my work impact upon slavery and non-gender based discrimination in the area in which I am working?"

Asking such questions can help mainstream anti-slavery practice to development and humanitarian work and lead to the sort of qualitative improvement in practice that gender mainstreaming brought two decades ago. It is for this reason that we campaigned from 2007 for slavery eradication to be included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and hence force attention to slavery onto the unwilling agendas of the development and aid agencies of the world.

The reports of, for example, trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation and forced marriage in the refugee camps of the Middle East show that this remains an urgent issue.

## **Conclusion**

200 years ago people like Equiano and Clarkson in Europe, and in the Americas, Sam Sharpe, Nat Turner, Touissant, the Maroons decided, for diverse reasons, to try to end slavery, so morally repugnant did they find it.

In doing so they took on a system that the writer Adam Hochschild has compared in the equivalence of its power to the oil industry today. In ending the slave trade through force of arms and force of argument in a mere 20 years they demonstrated what could be achieved when there is the collective will and the audacity of ambition to do so.

After his death the role of Hamilton in the history of his country was reduced to a crude caricature by Jefferson and his acolytes. Clarkson, Equiano, Turner and Sharpe, the Maroons, the Quakers, and the nascent trades unions have been substantially written out of the history of the anti-slavery struggle in favour of simpler narratives, and their role has been largely forgotten subsequently. Those historiographical injustices contribute not just to the misremembering of what happened, but the misunderstanding of why it happened. The achievements of 200 years ago were a classic example, in Bobby Kennedy's phrase, of numberless diverse acts of courage and belief shaping the history of the time.

Whatever our differences one thing that unites us is that we are all citizens in this world. And that brings with it not just rights but responsibilities. We have the responsibility to remember properly. We have the responsibility to think and to understand. We have the responsibility to act.

That was something that Roger Casement recognised in 1894 when he wrote an unsuccessful protest against the execution by Germany in Cameroon of 27 soldiers and their wives. The soldiers had mutinied in protest against their wives being whipped. In his appeal for clemency Casement said, "*... we all on earth have a commission and a right to defend the weak against the strong, and to protest against brutality in any shape or form*".

That remains I think a potent challenge to all of us to this very day. And, if we get right down to it, it is what still drives Anti-Slavery International today. We can point to an impressive array of achievements, from forcing the issue of slavery eradication onto the agenda of the international development community, to working with parliamentarians such as Baroness Butler-Sloss to bring victim protection and identification into the UK's Modern Slavery Act, to expanding the access to education for slavery vulnerable communities across West Africa. We have grasped Casement's commission and hold it still, a vital voice speaking the truth of human rights to the power of the vested interests who profit and benefit from the enslavement and exploitation of the vulnerable.

We have shown, and we continue to show and we will continue to show that if we chose to act with audacity and ambition that we can change the world, in big ways and in small ones, for the better.

With your support we will continue to do that until slavery is finally, truly, consigned to the dust bin of history. Because when we act with common and persistent purpose, in spite of all our flaws and diverse motives, in spite of the disinterest or selfishness of the forces ranged against us, in spite of all of that still, together, we can overcome.