19 September 2014

Ian Hook

Senior Executive Officer

Scrutiny Unit

7 Millbank

London SW1P 3JA

**WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMISSION TO THE PUBLIC BILL COMMITTEE**

**MODERN SLAVERY BILL**

We welcome the introduction of the Modern Slavery Bill and the UK Government’s commitment to eradicate the abuse and exploitation of workers, both in this country and globally. We congratulate the government in its ambition to be a global leader on this issue, but we believe the Draft Bill does not go far enough to protect, prevent and remedy modern slavery risks for workers in the UK and in global supply chains.

Evidence and awareness of modern slavery is growing, and is one of the worst human rights violations that persist today. Forced labour, child labour and trafficking for labour exploitation are complex problems that are often most prevalent in lower tiers of supply chains. This is where the most vulnerable workers (particularly migrants) are often invisible, and leverage for change is challenging.

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is a leading alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs that promotes respect for workers’ rights around the globe. Our membership includes over 80 large brands and retailers with a combined annual turnover of more than £180 billion, as well as the TUC and global trade union federations representing 160 million workers, and large NGOs such as Anti Slavery International.

Many of our members are at the forefront of voluntary initiatives to eradicate slavery in supply chains. However we do not believe that voluntary initiatives alone will be enough to ensure that all companies take the necessary steps to eradicate slavery from their supply chains. In line with recommendations from the Joint Committee on the Modern Slavery Bill, we believe the legislation should include appropriate provisions to address this.

First, we would like to see a **Transparency in Supply Chains clause in the Bill**. We believe smart legislation that requires all companies to be transparent about the steps they are taking to address modern slavery and child labour in their supply chains can help drive stronger and broader efforts to end abuse and exploitation of workers in supply chains. It would do this by ensuring companies would have to consider their policies and make public the steps they are taking to tackle modern slavery. This could create positive competition to improve practices.

The legislation would *not* require companies to take any specific action to combat slavery within their business, however it would require businesses to provide an accurate picture of the measures that they are using to address risks in their supply chain. ETI and a number of our members have commented on the TISC proposals drafted by the NGO coalition, and appreciate that they have consulted us. Many of our members agree with the spirit of the proposed TISC draft, but it was not appropriate or feasible to agree the specific text they propose.

Second, the **Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA)** is an example of an effective body that UK industry helped establish to manage and mitigate risks of slavery in the food and agriculture sector. We would like to see this model **extended to other high-risk areas such as fisheries, apparel, construction, cleaning, care and hospitality.**

Voluntary initiatives and partnerships can achieve vital progress in improving standards and tackling modern slavery. But effective and strong regulation can ensure such change occurs across industries, not just in the supply chains of responsible companies. In the food and agriculture sector where there is an effective licensing, investigation and enforcement system by the GLA, there are far fewer cases of modern slavery and where it is found, there are clear mechanisms to address it. In other sectors, the risks of modern slavery are high and the problem is growing.

It should also be noted that our members do not have the power - nor is it their remit - to investigate, prosecute and ensure appropriate legal protection for victims of forced labour. We know we can and must continue to do more to prevent modern slavery, and the media and the public demand that we do this. But we can do so more effectively where clear, well-designed regulation and appropriate cross-departmental support is in place.

Third, alongside our own efforts to take responsibility for policies and actions on modern slavery in our global supply chains, we would like you to assure us that there will be an **independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner** with appropriate power to monitor the legislation, ensure compliance and take action where necessary. He/she should have oversight of all government departments, relevant authorities and agencies and hold them to account in protecting citizens and workers from modern slavery with remediation and support to victims. It is also important that the Commissioner should be able to determine his/her programme of work.

Fourth, we believe that the Modern Slavery Bill should **extend legislative requirements to public procurement supply chains**. This will clearly demonstrate the UK government’s leadership and commitment in practice on modern slavery. More importantly, the magnitude of scale and investment in publicly procured goods and services will help industry drive sector-wide change.

Finally, we believe that **government departments with international presence and reach**, particularly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for International Development (DFID), **should play a greater role in helping UK industry tackle modern slavery in global supply chain**s. We would like to see the FCO and DFID take a more active role in bilateral and international engagement in areas related to human rights, strengthening the rule of law, government capacity and will to protect citizens and workers from abuse and exploitation, and ensure adequate monitoring and enforcement of legislation. The UK National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights could give greater attention to this issue and ensure monitoring and reporting by all government departments on modern slavery.

We strongly believe effective partnerships between government, the private sector, civil society and trade unions are critical – each playing their part with clear roles, responsibilities and accountability for identifying and acting on the problem.

Much of what is contained in this submission has been shared in a letter to the Prime Minister on 29th August, copied to Secretaries of State and Ministers in the Home Office and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The letter was jointly sponsored with the British Retail Consortium and included logos of 24 major high street retailers, brands and other companies, the TUC, and 10 NGOs.

The ETI and its members have also actively engaged with Home Office and BIS Ministers and officials over the past few months in round tables on the role of business in tackling modern slavery to provide and advice and share good practice in tackling this issue. We are committed to continue this engagement and to raise the level of ambition and know-how to help eradicate modern slavery – not only in the UK but also globally.

We wish the Committee success in its endeavours. We strongly believe that the Modern Slavery Bill presents the UK with the opportunity to be a global leader in the fight to end abuse and exploitation of workers in supply chains. We believe this could give our members and partners a stronger platform to promote ethical trade and prevent slavery in supply chains, within the UK and globally, if we can confidently assert that we are doing everything we can to address this problem in our ‘own back yard’.