

Andrew Forrest takes aim at G20, flawed anti-slavery laws



Andrew Forrest believes there are flaws in anti-slavery laws before Federal Parliament. Jason Alden



By **Brad Thompson**

Mining billionaire and philanthropist Andrew Forrest has taken aim at Australia and other developed nations for not doing enough to stamp out modern slavery.

He has backed the biggest-ever investigation into what he labelled a global crime with 40.3 million victims.

Mr Forrest said the findings of the 2018 Global Slavery Index sheeted home the blame for modern slavery to G20 nations importing \$US354 billion a year of products linked to forced labour.

The index, involving 71,000 face-to-face interviews with people in 48 countries and funded through the Forrest family's Minderoo Foundation, found slavery was much more prevalent in Australia than previously thought and involved about 15,000 people.

Greater exposure of forced marriages and prostitution rackets combined with changes in the way data is recorded pushed the Australian figure up from 4300 people in 2016.

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The data now includes evidence from women living overseas who say they were the victims of slavery in Australia.

Mr Forrest, who is New York to unveil the findings at United Nations headquarters, said developed nations were highly exposed to slavery through global trade flows.

He said pressure to respond to the "appalling human crime" had shifted from poorer countries to richer countries with the resources and institutions to do much better.

Slavery laws criticised

Mr Forrest said the federal government's Modern Slavery Bill introduced to Parliament last month was defective because it did not make provision for an independent commissioner.

Under the proposed laws, businesses with an annual turnover of more than \$100 million will have to identify any modern slavery in their supply chains and report it to authorities.

Labor has said it will back the laws but criticised the lack of penalties for companies who fail to report slavery.

Mr Forrest said companies that failed to act would suffer the wrath of investors and consumers, but it was vital to follow the lead of Britain where similar laws include an independent commissioner.

"It is a raw truth that the Modern Slavery Bill is before Parliament because business pushed for it," he said.

"There is an acceptance out there in the business world that modern slavery absolutely exists and that Australian consumers and supply chains need to be protected from it.

"Anyone who understands business knows that if you are looking at an industry such as labour which might have illegal aspects to it, you need someone to turn to who isn't likely to sue you when you go to them for advice.

"If you discover slavery in your supply chain, the best thing you can do is eliminate it and announce that. You will do that if have independent advice and an independent commissioner attached to the Modern Slavery Act is essential."

Mr Forrest is also demanding that government supply chains are subject to the same report standards as business.

His Fortescue Metals Group set the bar at a high level years ago when it demanded assurances from thousands of suppliers that they had no links to forced labour.

US tops list

The index found Australia's was importing at-risk products worth more \$US12 billion a year, including \$US6.6 billion in electronic devices from China. The five highest value at-risk imports were electronics, garments, fish, rice and cocoa.

The United States was named as the biggest importer of at-risk products (\$US144 billion annually). Japan (\$US47 billion) was next on the G20 list, followed by Germany (\$US30 billion), the UK (\$US18 billion) and France (\$16 billion).

Minderoo's Walk Free Foundation said 12 G20 countries were yet to formally enact laws or policies to stop businesses sourcing goods from forced labour despite the G20 last year committing to improve human rights due diligence in corporate operations and supply chains.

Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Italy, Britain and the US have introduced or are taking steps to introduce laws that would tackle modern slavery.

"The level of action G20 countries have taken to date to put an end to human trafficking and modern slavery has been limited," UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Kevin Hyland said.

"These nations have a responsibility to pioneer an end to the demand for imported goods produced by criminals who engage forced or exploited workers and perpetuate the multi-billion-dollar business of modern slavery."

The index found North Korea had the highest prevalence of modern slavery, with one in 10 people (2.6 million) forced to work. It was followed by Eritrea, Burundi, the Central African Republic and Afghanistan.

<https://www.afr.com/business/andrew-forrest-takes-aim-at-g20-flawed-antislavery-laws-20180718-h12v5d>

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