



COMMONWEALTH
LAW CONFERENCE 2025

CORPORATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS IN THE COMMONWEALTH



OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMONWEALTH

- The Commonwealth comprises of 56 nations each with different and diverse legal systems and labour market conditions.
- Some countries are on the forefront of attempting to eliminate modern slavery from supply chains.
- Whilst others, often less developed countries, are left to fend with weak labour laws, poor enforcement, and exploitative working conditions.
- It is our responsibility to unite the Commonwealth in its approach to ensuring compliance with international labour standards and human rights, such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- The Commonwealth is morally committed to global agendas such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in its goals of protection adults and children.
- However, we need to do more, need to unite as “one Commonwealth” to tackle human rights abuses in the supply chain.

THE NEED FOR STRONGER ENFORCEMENT

- Whilst not free from scrutiny, the United Kingdom and Australia have strong regulatory frameworks such as the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 and Australia's Modern Slavery Act 2018.
- South Africa and India have advanced labour laws, however, enforcement remains inconsistent.
- Bangladesh & Ghana have weak labour laws that have led to poor working conditions and mass human rights violations within the supply chain.
- Recommendations:
 - Commonwealth-wide minimum labour standard
 - Penalty-based enforcement
 - Cross-border legal cooperation

A CONTINUING EXPLOITATION

- Many companies rely on low-wage labour from developing Commonwealth countries, creating conditions of exploitation.
- Weak labour laws lead to issues such as forced labour, gender discrimination, and lack of union representation.
- Case Study: Lonmin and Marikana Massacre (South Africa, 2012).
 - Recommendations: **mandatory human rights due diligence, collective bargaining rights, whistleblower protections.**
- Child labour within the textiles, agriculture, and mining industry in Ghana, Bangladesh, and India.
- Case Study: Nestle and Cocoa Production in Ghana & Ivory Coast.
 - Recommendations: **corporate accountability laws, international trade agreements, funding child labour monitoring and rehabilitation programmes.**

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND TECHNOLOGY

- Ethical employment enhances brand reputation and long-term profitability. Companies are increasingly committing to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards.
- Case Study: Unilever's Fair Wage Policy
 - Recommendations: **partnerships between businesses, government and labour organisations and an independent monitoring mechanism.**
- Workers face challenges in this new gig economy, which has forced low wages, no social security, and no collective bargaining rights.
- Case Study: Uber & Ola's Treatment of Gig Workers in India
 - Recommendations: **employment laws to define gig workers as employees, minimum wage regulations for digital labour protections, enhance private-sector initiatives for gig worker protections.**

OUR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a **Commonwealth Employment Charter** setting minimum labour standards.

Promote **legal harmonisation**.

Implement **mandatory human rights due diligence laws**.

Introduce **financial penalties for companies violating labour rights**.

Foster **public-private partnerships** to improve employment conditions.

Strengthen **consumer and investor pressure on corporations** through transparency measures.