

We are Part of the Problem

According to the latest [2016 Global Slavery Index](#), it is estimated that 45.8 million people are in some form of modern slavery in 167 countries. There are more people in modern slavery now than ever before in the history of the world.

Slavery has existed for thousands of years but economic and social forces have seen an alarming resurgence in the past few decades. Modern slaves are cheap and disposable, purchased and thrown away like disposable foam in cups ([Kevin Bales](#)).

We contribute to the problem because we are part of the demand and supply chain. Slavery flows into our homes, offices and schools through the many products we purchase. As members of the Global Community we are consumers, unwittingly contributing to slavery. Have you ever stopped to consider that what you are wearing is at the cost of someone else's misery? Did you know a young girl of 14 may have been trafficked to make your cotton t-shirt? There are 200,000 girls trapped in a small area of India working in the spinning, weaving and dyeing mills through a human trafficking scheme. This area supplies most of the world's cotton knit fabric.

We are aware of the thousands of deaths during the fire in the Rana Plaza factory.

Across all industries, the production of goods and services we may take for granted, can disguise many forms of human trafficking. Much of the goods we purchase come from countries with the highest absolute numbers of people in modern slavery, such as India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan where it is estimated that in 2015 over 1 million people were forced to harvest the cotton crop.

Slaves harvest cocoa in West Africa. Much of the chocolate sold in Australia is produced, using child slave labour. About 1.5 to 2 million children work in cocoa plantations in Africa. Some are just eight years old.

During his visit to Sydney, the UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Mr. Hyland, reminded us that Human Trafficking is not so hidden – it is in our pockets i.e. in our mobile phones. Mining is one of the worst forms of child labour. Children as young as seven are inhaling toxic dust that can lead to fatal lung disease – to extract cobalt, a mineral used in rechargeable cell phone batteries. Amnesty International has revealed that children in the Congo work up to 12 hours a day underground, carrying back-breaking loads to make around \$2 a day to help feed their families.

Slavery in the supply chain is also present in food products and raw materials such as tuna, shrimp and cotton.

Pope Francis reminds us that **buying goods and services is a moral choice**. Today we are challenged to be mindful of the supply chain of goods and services when we shop. We can begin by looking for UTZ, Rainforest Alliance and Fairtrade logos when buying chocolate, tea and coffee, and downloading the Ethical [Fashion](#) and [Electronics](#) Guides produced by Baptist World Aid Australia.