

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To the Committee Inquiry,

Submission to committee inquiry: Establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia.

The purpose of this submission is to provide insight into the considerations of young Australians on the matter of modern slavery in regards to fashion design, a contributor to the 28.5 billion Australian dollar domestic fashion industry (Fashion industry statistics Australia). A Modern Slavery Act **should** be introduced in Australia. This submission will refer to the nature and extent of modern slavery; prevalence in the domestic and global supply chains of companies; and identifying international best practice as advised in the Terms of Reference. Recommendations in regards to regulations are included, such as creating transparency in company supply chains, introducing minimum wages and adopting disciplinary action where required.

It is with a heavy heart and distressing realisation that I put forth this submission, stating my opinion as a young Australian engaged in the fashion design industry (current Hons, Fashion Design), regarding the state of the impact of modern slavery on our world in 2017. As estimated, by the 2016 Global Slavery Index, 45.8 million people in 167 countries around the world are in some form of slavery. Bonded labor, forced labor, human trafficking, wage exploitation, however conveyed, are all akin to slavery; which is vastly apparent in the world we live in. International high profitable corporations, based in Australia and around the world, are participating in a 'race to the bottom'; ethically and sustainably. In a report conducted by Baptist World Aid Australia, it graded '106 brands operating in Australia and around the world'. It sought to assess the systems these brands have in place to protect the workers in the supply chains from exploitation, forced labor and child labor. The results were devastating, finding that only a mere 7% of companies could prove total transparency in tracing raw material and a limited few who were establishing grounds in their production line. According to the report, 14.2 million people are dealing with forced labor exploitation and a horrendous '168 million child laborers [are] scattered across the global economy'. (Baptist World Aid, 2017)

Growing up in a world where 'slavery' appears an irrelevant anachronism, it is abhorrent to think that there are more slaves in this modern day than at any other time in human history. In Australia alone there are approximately 4,300 modern slaves (Global Slavery Index 2017). An increase in awareness and action in Australia needs to be taken to address this issue. A useful example where such transparency has been successful is the Modern Slavery Act 2015 introduced in the UK, which requires businesses to disclose information regarding their supply chains and the actions taken to minimise the risk of slavery throughout production. In doing so, companies are obliged to trace and demonstrate their supply chain and make improvements where necessary. This is one step forward and should be considered in Australian legislation as a means of improving the Australia standard and eradicating slavery from this modern world.

Throughout the world these people, living breathing humans, no different to you or I, are beaten to death for speaking up for their human rights. These intelligent people are killed during their working day for something so fundamental such as asking for a living wage. These beautiful people, who have little to no self-dignity, are living off the bare minimum and are punished for attempting to lift the standard. These persevering people, who are denied their days' wage for arriving to work two minutes late. These helpless people, who will work a minimum 12 hours a day, seven days a week, only to receive their wage, weeks, even months after the due date. These extraordinary people, working in conditions that don't stray far from a baron building site. These divine human beings are blatantly exploited on a world stage while the rich get richer and consumers are blinded to this exchange. Is it not outright obvious that this is not ok? I do not want my future children to grow up in a backwards world where capitalism dominates and slave labor is accepted.

Australia is the second largest consumer of textiles in the world, buying approximately 27 kilograms of new clothing per person, per year. Majority of these clothes end up contributing to the 500,000 tonnes of textiles and leather thrown into landfill annually (Australian Environmental-Economic Accounts 2013, ABoS). This excessive societal product consumption makes us one of the largest accessories to the modern slavery epidemic. The saying 'there is strength in numbers', is truly relevant in this case, given the Australian textile consumption. An opportunity has arisen wherein our country can unite as one, through legislative reform, preventing or lessening this destruction. We really do have the power to change, we have the power to start a revolution.

As a working student in the fashion industry I have gained unexpected and shocking insight into practices used by multi-national companies to gain maximum profit while keeping their name 'clean' from culpability. It is absolutely immoral and unacceptable for these companies to relieve themselves of accountability in regards to their own supply chain. It is time these major contributors take ownership and move forward in helping reduce this corrupt system rather than pathetically patching up a growing wound. This cannot be achieved without appropriate legislation to set regulations. The fashion industry, particularly in Australia, has the absolute ability in enabling millions of workers' access to living wages and improved working conditions.

In response to this, the introduction of an Act in Australia should outline the following:

- **100%** traceability of supply chain in raw material and working conditions.

- **Adopt** a national minimum living wage to be paid to all workers used and sourced within Australia and globally.

- **Increase** awareness in the general community on the effects of supply chains.

- **Labels**, tags and packaging must include full details of material traceability and production.

- **Ensure** all perpetrators receive suitable punishment for modern slavery crimes; as demonstrated in the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015.
- **Follow** through with a reparation order ensuring the victim is fully compensated for all wrongdoing.
- **Introduce** a risk order prohibiting persons to participate in any modern slavery act within Australia and anywhere outside of Australia.
- **Continue** to monitor and oversee practices within Australia on a national and international level and make improvements when deemed necessary.

By adopting such legislation in Australia, it will help facilitate momentum towards a ‘future where no one is victim of human trafficking or slavery, and the human rights of all people are valued equally.’ Commitment to this proposal is outlined in the *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery 2015-19*. I would like to see solid regulations put in place to support those in need to eliminate modern slavery in the immediate future. This response will elevate Australia as a global leader in taking action towards a major issue.

Everyone in this world deserves to be treated with the utmost respect, we are all equal and we are all of significance. This is a matter of choice in providing service and protection where needed most. I ask you to please find the goodness in your hearts to do all that you possibly can in moving forward with this Act. It is imperative to create awareness and modifications immediately so future generations can build and progress on this global revolution.

Yours sincerely,

Celeste Astorino

RMIT University: Current Bachelor of Fashion Design (Hons).