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The Power of Connection and Collaboration in the Fight Against Modern Slavery

Sources: IPS

The COVID-19 pandemic affected countries and people around the world, while exacerbating vulnerabilities such as different forms of modern slavery.

It is estimated that there are more than 40.3 million people in modern slavery in the world, and certain population groups, sectors and geographies, such as children, migrant workers, women and girls, who were already vulnerable, became more vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation during the pandemic.

The United Nations (UN) has described the pandemic as more than just a health crisis: "it is an economic crisis, a humanitarian crisis and a human rights crisis."

UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for addressing the fight against covid as a global emergency, stating that the global economy remains uncertain, health systems are overwhelmed and millions more people are being pushed into poverty.

"The world has regressed," [Said Romy Hawatt](#), a founding member of the Global Sustainability Network (GSN) in an exclusive interview with IPS.

"Modern abuses of human rights and dignity are completely abhorrent and unacceptable in all their forms and at all levels. Governments around the world are failing in their

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responsibility to protect their citizens (especially children) and are not devoting the necessary attention and resources to fighting these crimes against humanity."

As a "social entrepreneur", he has used his business success in the world of aviation and other activities and its platforms to develop, finance and directly implement solutions to social, cultural and environmental problems. What began many years ago as an informal charity, ended up making him a philanthropist, supporter and benefactor of several charities, including GSN.

In November 2020, more than 50 independent UN human rights experts warned [in a special document](#) that the covid pandemic helped the pernicious gambling of slavers and traffickers, and that, therefore, it was necessary to strengthen government measures to prevent the exploitation of vulnerable people during this special period.

The declaration urged Governments and businesses to recognize that the loss of jobs, income or land could put vulnerable groups of the population at great risk and that exploitation could mean forced labour, including the worst forms of child labour, or be sold to those in those groups. trafficked and sexually exploited.

That report, submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, noted that more than 70% of the 4.8 million victims of sexual exploitation are in the Asia-Pacific region, 1.5 million victims live in countries of the industrial North and that an estimated 13,000 are enslaved in the United Kingdom alone.



Entrepreneur and philanthropist Romy Hawatt, a founding member of the Global Sustainability Network (GSN), in a photo of his LinkedIn profile, surrounded by Arab men. Photo: LinkedIn

Hawatt, with UAE-based companies, was one of the founding members of GSN in 2014, along with Dubai-based businessman and philanthropist Raza Jafar, retired English Anglican Bishop Alastair Redfern and Argentine Catholic Bishop Marcelo Sanchez, who met with the vision of promoting a world free of slavery, child labour and human trafficking.

This began after world religious leaders signed a [Joint Declaration against Modern Slavery](#) in December 2014, in which Catholic Pope Francis, anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Greece and other senior representatives of the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist religions participated.

With an increasing number of change agents and influencers joining the GSN, Hawatt states that "each of them plays a leading role in raising awareness, education, articulating and putting pressure on the powers that be, government, academic, business, media and sports to harness the power of connections and collaborations." that everyone can contribute.

The goal, he explained, is to help achieve 8 of the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), which is aimed at promoting decent work and economic growth.

In particular, they call for [the achievement of target 8.7 of that SDG](#), which focuses on "taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, ending contemporary forms of slavery and trafficking in persons and ensuring the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and, by 2025, end child labour in all its forms."

The plan for the future of GSN, Hawatt explained, is to keep moving forward and making the most sustainable impact possible, using all available means and platforms to articulate, inspire, invigorate and support an abundant group of influencers and collaborators such as those associated with the GSN, in order to expose all forms of human exploitation and fight against them.

Governments around the world, in response to contain the pandemic since its inception in March 2020, ordered closures of activities and limited job opportunities, while traffickers

adapted their methods to the pandemic, including social media and other online platforms to recruit new victims.

"Women and girls have been recruited, often locally or online, for sexual exploitation, especially in private apartments. Children have been particularly affected, outside of school and with the need to support parents who have lost their livelihoods, increasingly led by traffickers locally and online," says a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The report by the UN agency, also known by the acronym UNODC, indicates that "traffickers responded to the closure of bars, clubs and massage parlors (due to closures, curfews and other measures to control the spread of covid19) by moving the sexual exploitation of adults and children to private homes and apartments."

"In some countries, traffickers have also taken advantage of social distancing measures to transport victims across national borders, knowing that security forces have at times been unable to carefully inspect vehicles," UNODC said.

According to that report, there are at least three ways covid hurts efforts to end modern slavery:

- 1) increasing the risks for those already exploited;
- 2) increasing the risks of exploitation, including child labour and child marriage; and
- 3) disrupting response efforts.

"Simply put, traffickers target the most vulnerable and it is women and children who fit into this category, especially those from the poorest communities, perhaps refugees and those without education, who fall into the category most at risk of being trafficked, "it is refugees." Hawatt said.

In his view, human smuggling is not just a problem of the countries of the South. "Human trafficking happens literally everywhere. Knowingly or not, we are all consumers who create demand and work or drive supply chains that use and abuse other human beings. Therefore, we have an obligation to help solve it," he said.

Source: <https://ipsnoticias.net/2022/02/el-poder-de-la-conexion-y-la-colaboracion-en-lucha-contra-esclavitud-moderna/>

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