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Anti-Trafficking Leaders Call on G7 to Address Forced Labor

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A coalition of 21 human trafficking survivors, advocates, researchers and anti-trafficking leaders sent a letter to the G7 today urging them to take specific action on forced and child labor at the G7 Summit taking place June 26-28 in Germany. Russia’s unjust invasion of Ukraine has forced millions of people, mostly women and children, to flee their homes and become vulnerable to exploitation, making it more important than ever for G7 leaders to take action against forced labor around the world.

“As leaders of the most prosperous nations in the world, the G7 must demonstrate that forced labor has no place in global markets. In addition, specific action must be taken to address the exploitation of refugees, displaced people and other highly vulnerable populations, such as migrant and informal workers, women, children and other marginalized groups. These populations must also be meaningfully included in the development of solutions, and their experience and leadership should be recognized and honored,” the letter states.

Read the full letter below:

June 13, 2022

Dear G7 Leaders,

Last year, G7 Leaders stood united in expressing deep concern about the use of forced labor in global supply chains. We applaud the work of G7 Trade Ministers in making clear the G7’s collective resolve to take specific steps to protect individuals from human trafficking and forced labor.

Since the 2021 G7 meetings, the world has watched in horror as Russia illegally and unjustly invaded Ukraine. In addition to threatening the lives and livelihoods of all Ukrainian people, President Putin’s assault also jeopardizes global food supplies, unsettles energy markets, disrupts supply chains, and has caused the largest movement of people in Europe since World War II. Recent estimates indicate that more than 12 million people, mostly women and children, have fled their homes since the beginning of Russia’s invasion with nearly half seeking safety outside Ukraine.

The risks facing people on the move are well known. With limited access to support networks, basic resources, and livelihood opportunities, refugees face significant risks of exploitation. Research from past conflicts demonstrates that human traffickers prey on refugees in a myriad of ways. Using coercive tactics such as promising access to food,

shelter, and other basic necessities, as well as misleading opportunities for employment, traffickers target and take advantage of refugees' vulnerabilities, exploiting them under false pretenses. A **recent study** from the Freedom Fund and La Strada International specifically highlighted significant concerns about refugee women's vulnerability to labor exploitation.

As the threat of exploitation facing people on the move and other vulnerable populations increases, it is more important than ever for G7 leaders to reaffirm their commitment to addressing forced labor around the world and begin to take significant, coordinated action. In last year's G7 communique, the leaders committed to action; it is now imperative that when G7 leaders meet in Germany in June, discussions about how to address human trafficking, child labor and forced labor are on the agenda.

As leaders of the most prosperous nations in the world, the G7 must demonstrate that forced labor has no place in global markets. In addition, specific action must be taken to address the exploitation of refugees, displaced people and other highly vulnerable populations, such as migrant and informal workers, women, children and other marginalized groups. These populations must also be meaningfully included in the development of solutions, and their experience and leadership should be recognized and honored.

To reaffirm its commitment to eradicating forced labor and exploitation, we call on the G7 to take these four specific, attainable steps:

1. Follow through on a commitment made by Trade Ministers in 2021 to **convene a technical discussion** to share data and evidence and develop recommendations based on best practices to prevent, identify, and eliminate forced labor in global supply chains. Survivor leaders and representatives of labor and human rights organizations should be prioritized for inclusion in this discussion.

2. **Affirm that any future trade agreement, trade preference program or other trade tool employed by a G7 country contains provisions specifically prohibiting the use of forced labor** and requiring respect for fundamental rights, such as the right to work and freedom of association found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These should also require minimum compliance standards, including due diligence criteria, for the elimination of human trafficking and forced labor which include prohibiting and punishing these acts. G7 nations should also provide support to lower income trading partners to help achieve these standards and facilitate trade free of forced labor.

3. **Commit new financial resources to addressing human trafficking and forced labor**, including the commitment of resources to assist people who have been victimized by forced labor or human trafficking in global supply chains.

4. **Harmonize minimum legal and regulatory standards to address forced labor across the G7 and adopt new legislative frameworks as necessary.** Such harmonization should include all members prohibiting the import, export or internal sale of goods and merchandise made or transported wholly or in part by forced labor, and mandating companies operating in their jurisdiction conduct human rights and environmental due diligence in their operations and supply chains, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. To support the principle of mutual

recognition of forced labor prohibitions, G7 members should commit to creating and strengthening mechanisms for robust information and data sharing as well as the development of common criteria and methods based on best practices.

Sincerely,

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Program Manager, National Survivor Network

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About the McCain Institute at Arizona State University

Inspired by Senator John McCain and his family's legacy, the McCain Institute at Arizona State University is non-partisan and fights to secure democracy and alliances, defend human rights, protect the vulnerable and advance character-driven leadership in all communities and around the world.

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