

Study Guide

For the

United Nations Human Rights Council

On the topic of

**Modern Day Slavery and Forced Labour in the Arab
World**



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1. The Committee: United Nations Human Rights Council

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an inter-governmental body of the United Nations. The Council is the successor of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), established in 1946 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was a body created under the terms of article 68 of the United Nations Charter¹. The UNCHR met for the first time in January 1947 and established a drafting committee for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The original council was created in order to examine and report on human rights situations in specific countries or territories, as well as on major phenomena of human rights violations worldwide. The Commission held its final meeting in Geneva on March 27, 2006 and was replaced by the United Nations Human Rights Council in the same year.

Today, the UNHRC is a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and works in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The most important and known document regarding Human Rights is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The UNHRC was established by General Assembly resolution 60/251 of March 15 2006². The purpose of the UNHRC is identified in Res. 60/251 as "being responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner". The Council is located in Geneva, Switzerland. It is composed of 47 members, elected by the UN General Assembly. A State, in order to be elected, has to prove its contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights. Other relevant and voluntary promises and commitments are also taken into account. A member is elected for three years. The seats are distributed, according to the geographical distribution criteria, among the United Nations regional groups: 13 are selected among the African States, 13 from Asia, 6 from Eastern Europe, 8 from Latin America and the Caribbean and 7 from the Western European and Others Group.

The competences of the UNHRC fall under the mandate put forward in A/RES/60/251. According to the mandate, the UNHRC has to:

1. Promote human rights education and learning as well as advisory services, technical assistance and capacity building
2. Serve as a forum for dialogue on thematic issues on all human rights
3. Make recommendations to the General Assembly for the further development of international law in the field of human rights
4. Promote the full implementation of human rights obligations undertaken by States and follow-up to the goals and commitments related to the promotion and protection of human rights emanating from United Nations conferences and summits
5. Undertake a universal periodic review, based on objective and reliable information, of the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments in a manner which ensures universality of coverage and equal treatment with respect to all States

¹ <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art68.shtml> (Accessed 27/10/2021)

² https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/a.res.60.251_en.pdf (Accessed 27/10/2021)



6. Contribute, through dialogue and cooperation, towards the prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies
7. Work in close cooperation in the field of human rights with Governments, regional organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society
8. Make recommendations with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights
9. Submit an annual report to the General Assembly.

The Human Rights Council is characterized by some of its Special Procedures. Special Procedures represent individual human rights experts who report on specific countries or human rights themes. These can either be individual experts or working groups composed of several experts or special rapporteurs. The Council reviews the thematic mandates every three years and the country's specific mandates every year. The responsibilities of each Special Procedure are described in the specific Council Resolution that describes its mandate. In general, the responsibilities include country visits, direct communication with the States on alleged human rights violations, studies, advocacy, and recommendations for the States as well as to maintain contact with the civil society. The Reports of Special Procedure mandate holders are presented to the Council or the UNGA.

2. Introduction

The International Labour Organization defines forced labour as involuntary work as a result of force, fraud or deception when a penalty or the threat of a penalty is used to coerce³. Further definitions as the one provided by The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery define slavery as: the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised, and slave means a person in such condition or status. A person of servile status means a person in the condition or status resulting from situations such as, but not limited to, child labour, debt, forced marriage, human trafficking, penal labour and sexual slavery. The term human trafficking means and includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a person acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged; and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves by whatever means of conveyance⁴.

The modern slave trade is quite different. All racial groups are vulnerable to be objects of the trade. Though women and children are its principal victims, those who are bought, sold and enslaved come from almost every continent and are sold into slavery in virtually every country. Unlike the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Medieval European serfdom or the Trans-Saharan slave trade, modern day slavery is not officially legal in any country. This means there are relatively few very established and stable routes and markets. Records of these underground business transactions are largely hidden from public view; so are the human beings who are bought and sold in this twenty first-century slave trafficking. The pervasiveness and the relatively invisible nature of this illegal trafficking make it difficult to define and develop a strategy for abolishing it⁵.

The Arab World is defined as the Nations comprising the Arab League. It reaches from Mauritania in Northwest Africa to Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula in West Asia.

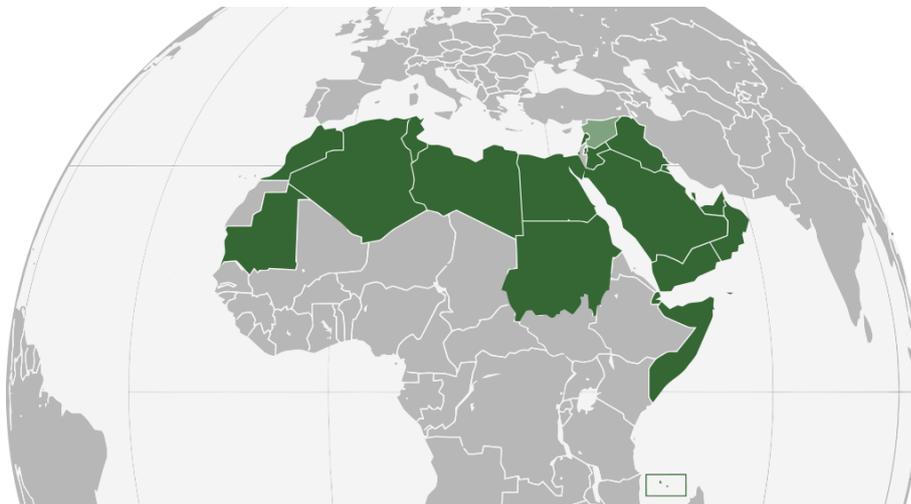


Figure 1: Member States of the Arab League ⁶

³ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/definition/lang--en/index.htm> (Accessed 27/10/2021)

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/SupplementaryConventionAbolitionOfSlavery.aspx> (Accessed 27/10/2021)

⁵ Guay, J. (2012). *The Economic Foundations of Contemporary Slavery*. University of Denver.

⁶ [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabische_Liga#/media/Datei:Arab_League_\(orthographic_projection\)_updated.svg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabische_Liga#/media/Datei:Arab_League_(orthographic_projection)_updated.svg) (Accessed 27/10/2021)

3. Overview and Types of Modern Slavery

In 2017 the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that over 40 million people are live in some form of slavery worldwide⁷. This includes 25 million in forced labour and 15 million forced marriage. 71 % of modern slavery victims are women, 25% are children. Over a five year span over 89 million people experienced some form of modern day slavery. This is the highest record on total amount of population ever estimated. It is also one of the smallest proportions of the world population ever in slavery. The Global Slavery Index states that India has the highest absolute numbers of people in slavery⁸. The highest prevalence of slavery was found in North Korea, Eritrea and Burundi. From this report the largest hotspots of slavery are the Asia-Pacific Region and Africa. However, it also states a key problem with the Data: Almost no reliable Data could be gathered on the Arabian Peninsula, and generally the Data for more developed countries is unreliable. In these countries existing illegal slavery and human trafficking is much more hidden, and the methodology of questioning victims of slavery becomes almost impossible.



Figure 2 Profits per victim of forced labour⁹

One of the main reasons modern slavery has reach these numbers is the fact that a billion people scrape by on \$1 a day. That extreme poverty combined with local government corruption and a global economy that leaps national boundaries has produced a surge in the number of slaves¹⁰. The global economy is a powerful force which produces demand. Some companies have the capability to look all over the globe in order to find under-regulated labour markets. In those kinds of markets, they are able to benefit from cheaper wages and little to no worker protection. In the global economy companies exploiting these possibilities are successful¹¹. At the same time, slavery in more developed

⁷ https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_575479/lang--en/index.htm (Accessed 27/10/2021)

⁸ <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/global-findings/> (Accessed 27/10/2021)

⁹ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/policy-areas/statistics/lang--en/index.htm> (Accessed 27/10/2021)

¹⁰ UN Chronicle, (2008). *Slavery in the Twenty-First Century*. Dodson, H.

¹¹ http://web.archive.org/web/20081203043214/http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_089199.pdf [Accessed 27 Aug. 2016]

economies is much more profitable. If a construction worker earns 3000\$ a month, replacing him with forced labour is extremely profitable.

Types of modern slavery

Child labour

Child labour is one of the types of labour considered as modern slavery. When we speak about child labour, we are referring to the employment of children in any kind of work that deprives children of their childhood. It is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful. This practice is considered exploitative by many governments, professionals and international organizations. That is why legislation across the world prohibits child labour. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999) provide legal prohibition under international law. Child labour has been recorded throughout most of history. Nowadays it is prevalent mainly in developing countries, where there is a higher percentage of poverty and the opportunities to access education are fewer. The largest employer of child labour worldwide currently is the agricultural sector. Vast majority of child labour is found in rural settings and informal urban economy. Children are predominantly employed by their parents, rather than factories.

Globally the incidence of child labour significantly decreased from 25% to 10% between 1960 and 2003, according to the World Bank. Nevertheless, the total number of child labourers remains high. The International Labour Organization and UNICEF calculated that 168 million children aged 5–17 worldwide, were involved in child labour in 2013. The main kinds of works where children are enslaved are farming, camel jockeys, domestic labour, drug trafficking, fireworks manufacturing, fishing, brick-making, carpet-weaving, sex work, stone quarrying, and soldiers. The major hotspots of children slaves are found in the Gulf States, South Asia, West and Central Africa. Sexual exploitation of children is found throughout the world.

Conscription

Conscription is the compulsory enlistment of people in a national service, most often a military service. Conscription is controversial for a range of reasons, including conscientious objection to military engagements on religious or philosophical grounds; political objection, for example to service for a disliked government or unpopular war; and ideological objection, for example, to a perceived violation of individual rights.

Debt bondage

Debt bondage can also be called as debt slavery or bonded labour. It is the situation where a person is enslaved in order to repay a debt with their labour. Although it may seem as a common labour agreement where a person works in order to obtain money and pay a debt, the labourer is unaware of the amount of services required to repay the debt and the duration of them. Debt bondage can be passed on from generation to generation. It is considered that between 18m and 22.5m people are currently in debt bondage worldwide, with roughly 85% of them in South Asia. In India, this practice was legal until 1976 but it remains prevalent. The reason it prevails in South Asia and in developing countries in general, is that these have few mechanisms for credit security or bankruptcy, the caste system, and where fewer people hold formal title to land or possessions. This form of feudal servitude allows the class to coercively extract and extort far more labour out of the debtor than the fair value of the credit they received. The people enslaved through debt bondage are desperate for credit. The

immediate reasons vary: food, consumption, shelter, to rebuild after a monsoon or natural disaster. They need money for the basic needs and rituals of life. The only asset they have as collateral is their physical labour. The most powerful force that keeps people ensnared in debt bondage is the lack of a viable alternative. The sector where most cases are recorded is the "end" of the supply chain. Supply chains can be very complex; therefore there are occasions where a company that's importing goods may not realize exactly what's going on the far side of their supply chain. The industries that have the highest prevalence included products like rice, tea, coffee and construction. The main kinds of work performed by debt bondage are farming, brick-making, carpet-weaving, domestic labour, stone quarrying, sex work ¹². The hotspots of these activities are India, Pakistan and Nepal. By the UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) bonded labour at an international level has been prohibited.

Forced migrant labour

Forced migrant labour takes place when an individual is forced to work against their will, under threat of violence or other punishment, with restrictions on their freedom and a degree of ownership is exerted over them. The slaves are forced to work under different areas such as construction, maintenance of roads, rails and bridges, farming, and domestic labour. In terms of numbers, forced labour is most widespread in Asia. It affects migrant workers, who are trafficked within countries or across borders, as well as bonded labourers, for example in India and Pakistan. It is recorded that income inequality and poverty are the main economic factors that force individuals into this kind of slavery. Other factors contributing to risk and vulnerability include lack of education, illiteracy, gender and migration. International law considers forced labour a crime. It is prohibited in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which obliges all member states to promote core conventions, including the forced labour conventions, regardless of whether they have ratified them or not.

Forced marriage

When we refer to forced marriage, we speak about a marriage in which one or both parties marry without their consent or against their will. Forced marriage violates the principle of the freedom and autonomy of individuals, and that is why the UN considers it as a form of human rights abuse. Forced marriage has been forbidden not only in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also in the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery. The former states that a woman's right to choose a spouse and enter freely into marriage is central to her life and dignity, and equality as a human being. The later prohibits marriage without right to refuse of herself out of her parents', families' and/or other persons' will and requires the minimum age for marriage to prevent this. It is still practiced generally in some parts of South Asia and Africa. In the countries it takes place it is not a national practice but cultural, varying from region to region.

Forced prostitution

Forced prostitution occurs when there is coercion made by a third party. Forced prostitution refers to conditions of control over a person who is coerced by another to engage in sexual activity. The crime is committed against the person because of the violation of the victim's rights of movement through coercion and because of their commercial exploitation. In Asia, Japan is the main destination country for trafficked women. These women hail especially from the Philippines and Thailand. In 2009 it was estimated that 200,000 to 400,000 people were trafficked through Southeast Asia for prostitution.

¹² <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21646199-how-reduce-bonded-labour-and-human-trafficking-everywhere-supply-chains> [Accessed 26 Aug. 2016]



Human trafficking

The Trafficking Protocol defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal, manipulation or implantation of organs. The UN states Trafficking Protocol that albeit human trafficking can occur at local levels, it is a transnational issue. The UN formulated Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000) where they banned these sorts of activities¹³. The most common kinds of labour being performed by slaves under human traffic are farming, child camel jockeys, domestic labour, fishing, mail-order brides, market stall labour, small repair shop work, restaurant labour, and sex industry¹⁴. United Nations officials have described the trafficking of women and children across Asia as "the largest slave trade in history". It is believed that in Asia and the Pacific alone, more than 30m children have been traded over the last thirty years. The main explanations given were that a combination of poverty, globalization, organized crime and discrimination against women encouraged the trade.

Religious slavery

Religious slavery is motivated by the belief that people who are not members of the same religion are worth less and can be exploited without repercussions. Islamist slavery exists mainly through extremist Islamic organizations such as Boko Haram and ISIS¹⁵. Islam neither ignores nor condemns slavery. In fact, a large part of the Sharia is dedicated to the practice. As Muslims are encouraged by Islam to follow Muhammad's lifestyle, slavery is accepted in the central religious text of Islam. He captured slaves in battle; he had sex with his slaves; and he instructed his men to do the same. While Islamic law does allow slavery under certain conditions, it's almost inconceivable that those conditions could ever occur in today's world, and so slavery is effectively illegal in modern Islam. Muslim countries also use secular law to prohibit slavery¹⁶.

During the reign of The Islamic State in parts of Syria and Iraq, this kind of slavery became very common in regions they controlled. Non-Muslims and members of non-accepted schools of Islam were the main victims of this slavery.

Peonage

We consider a person under peonage when the labourer has little to none control over his employment conditions.

Penal labour

¹³ <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html> [Accessed 26 Aug. 2016]

¹⁴ <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21646200-thailands-fishing-industry-rife-trafficking-and-abuse-here-be-monsters> [Accessed 27 Aug. 2016]

¹⁵ <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21661812-islamic-states-revival-slavery-extreme-though-it-finds-disquieting-echoes-across> [Accessed 26 Aug. 2016].

¹⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/slavery_1.shtml [Accessed 26 Aug. 2016]



By using the term penal labour we refer to the forced labour that some prisoners are obliged to perform, especially manual labour. The work carried out depending on the sentence might be light or hard. Large-scale implementations of penal labour include labour camps, prison farms, penal colonies, penal military units, penal transportation, or aboard prison ships.

Sexual slavery

In the Rome Statute it is states that sexual slavery is particular form of enslavement which includes limitations on one's autonomy, freedom of movement and power to decide matters relating to one's sexual activity. Thus, the crime also includes forced marriages, domestic servitude or other forced labour that ultimately involves forced sexual activity. In contrast to the crime of rape, which is a completed offence, sexual slavery constitutes a continuing offence. ... Forms of sexual slavery can, for example, be practices such as the detention of women in "rape camps" or "comfort stations", forced temporary "marriages" to soldiers and other practices involving the treatment of women as chattel, and as such, violations of the peremptory norm prohibiting slavery.

United Nations, the ILO and modern slavery

The two most relevant international organizations in the field of forced labour are the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation. These two have a long story of battling against what nowadays represent the institution of slavery. The most important documents in this matter were composed by the ILO and are: the Forced Labour Convention and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention. Not only are they considered the two most essential legislations in order to set an end to forced labour but also the most widely ratified of all ILO instruments.

The Director-General of the ILO has declares that "forced labour is the antithesis of decent work", and that "it causes untold human suffering and steals from its victims. Modern forced labour can be eradicated, providing there is a sustained commitment by the international community, working together with government, employers, workers and civil society. "

Further legislation by the ILO is:

- Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, entered into force in 1957
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children
- Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air
- Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
- ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

4. Slavery in the Arab World

History

In the Arab world, slavery was commonplace throughout the medieval era up until the 19th century. The Eastern slave trade commonly refers to the Trans-Saharan and East African slave trade. The main sources of slaves for the Arab world were Non-Muslim Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Islam allowed for slavery, but moderated it by putting limits on who could be enslaved, the mistreatment of slaves, the enslavement of other Muslims, and a by allowing slaves to reach their freedom. While slavery was common similarly to Europe or the Americas, rights and conditions of slaves were significantly better. Still, the slave trade in the Arab world had similarly dimensions as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and even increased further when the latter was ended at the beginning of the 19th century¹⁷. In large parts of the Arab World, slavery was initially abolished by the colonial overlords that took control of the region in the 19th century, most notably the British and French Empires. In many countries slavery remained forbidden after gaining independence. Some countries in the Area outlawed slavery only relatively recently: Qatar in 1952, Yemen in Saudi Arabia in 1962 and Mauritania in 1980. Modern Islam is very firm on its stance against slavery, the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam states that: *“Human beings are born free, and no one has the right to enslave, humiliate, oppress or exploit them, and there can be no subjugation but to God the Most-High.”*

Current Situation

The different states in the Arab World have disparate situations regarding slavery. This is majorly connected to the countries' economic situation. Much of modern slavery is poverty driven. Mauretania has one of the highest slavery populations in the world. The slaves there are mostly natives, and the late abolition of slavery in Mauretania is a sign of the cultural importance slavery still has. Here, changing people's perspectives and the societal structure is the most vital method of fighting slavery.

In the rich Gulf States such as The UAE, Saudi Arabia or Kuwait on the other hand, slavery is very hard to classify and quantify. Here, the traditional slavery is not relevant, instead forced migrant labour is of great concern. International workers travel to these countries, and when they arrive get stripped of their passports and crowded into communal housing. They are out of the way of the population and work without the option of returning home or changing jobs. Many of these workers do get paid, but less than what has been promised, and combined with the restriction to their freedom of travel these conditions constitute forced labour. A highly publicized example of these cases have been the construction workers building stadiums for the 2022 Football World Cup in Qatar¹⁸. The report states that migrant workers have to pay a fee to recruiters to get work. They were deceived about the pay and accommodations, sometimes only paid half of what was promised and housed in overcrowded spaces outside of the cities and away without transportation. If they complained about their conditions, they are threatened with legal action, their passports are taken away to lock them in their jobs and they have to endure hazardous working conditions. Ove 6500 workers are estimated to have already died for World Cup construction alone¹⁹. Government and FIFA reactions from outside the country have been few, even though all involved entities are officially opposed to slavery. This also includes the Qatari government which says it will investigate these findings, but has accepted these

¹⁷ https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/slavery_1.shtml (Accessed 27/10/2021)

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35931031> (Accessed 27/10/2021)

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022> (Accessed 27/10/2021)



conditions for many migrant workers for years without any substantial or effective response. This inaction is symptomatic for the Gulf States. All of them have significant foreign work forces which are often split in different conditions. Highly qualified workers are paid and treated fairly, while low income workers are exploited and suppressed. The main sources for these labourers are India, Pakistan, Nepal and surrounding, poorer countries. These labourers often work in construction, chemical plants or other hazardous conditions. There is also a significant female forced labour population working as household help or being forced into marriages.

Another situation is present in the unstable Nations in the region: Syria, Yemen, Libya and Sudan are all locations of major conflicts. In these areas it is extremely difficult to protect human rights and the population is at a big risk of becoming subject to slavery. This especially endangers children, who are often forced to work or fight as child soldiers, and women, who are at a high risk of becoming victims of forced marriage, sex slavery and human trafficking to other countries. Protecting these vulnerable groups from slavery is one of the focuses of the international community.

5. Block positions

Gulf States

These Nations have stable governments and officially ban slavery. Slavery in these countries is possible due to a mixture of corruption of the responsible government authorities and the political influence of companies profiting of the cheap labour. Recently, there has been increasing pressure internationally and internal in these countries to better enforce the laws.

European Union and North America

The European Union's member states and The USA are major proponents of fighting slavery around the globe. They also want to fight the associated human trafficking, that leads to most cases of slavery in their own Nations and other illegal immigration. Still, some of these Nation's companies profit off of forced labour in other countries, and they are dependent on resource imports from Arab countries.

India and other Origin Countries

India has the largest slave population in the world and is actively fighting slavery in their own Nation. The main driving force for Indian slavery is the societal structure and caste system. This system means that many people see slavery for some parts of the population as legitimate, making the fight against it very difficult. Indian and Pakistani workers also make up a large part of the forced Labour workforce in the Arab States, and the Indian and Pakistani governments are advocating in favour of the workers forced into slavery. Notable Origin countries for the Gulf states also include: Nepal, Indonesia and the Philippines. These Nations are profiting of the money made by their people in the Arab states that is often send home to support families. At the same time they want to improve the rights and situations of their citizens in foreign nations. For the North African Arab countries, destination countries are mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. This also includes the large amount of refugees and migrants looking to travel to Europe and passing through these countries.

6 . Questions a Resolution Should Answer

1. How can the amount and types of slavery in the Arab World be properly analyzed?
2. Which Protection strategies against which slavery type should be implemented?
3. How can societal acceptance of slavery be changed?
4. Can outside pressure be applied to governments hesitant to enforce slavery bans?
5. How can human trafficking from conflict regions be restricted?
6. What is the role of Islam in modern day slavery of the Arab World?
7. Can the HRC/ UN cooperate with the Arab League as an organization to fight slavery in a joint program?
8. What kind of cooperation between the HRC and local governments is possible?

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