



NZ businesses show leadership with support for a Modern Slavery Act

****Embargoed until 16 March 2021****

More than 80 New Zealand companies have signed a joint letter urging the government to instigate an inquiry into whether New Zealand needs a Modern Slavery Act. The open letter will be presented to **Minister Wood** in Wellington today.

40 million people globally are currently in modern slavery. The world is small and interconnected. Every time we purchase a product there is a chain reaction felt around the world. At risk goods are entering the New Zealand market and New Zealand businesses are seeking support for a level playing field where safe and healthy conditions for producers are the benchmark.

No country or industry supply chains are unaffected. Two-thirds of all people in modern slavery live in Asia Pacific – the region New Zealand trades with extensively. Currently, New Zealand does not know the level of modern slavery within New Zealand.

Unlike many other countries, New Zealand has no accountability legislation that addresses transparency in supply chains. This means that New Zealand companies could unknowingly be importing products or services by which people are exploited and enslaved.

New Zealand companies want that to change. They say countries that prioritise ethics and sustainability - must show leadership and reject supply chains that include modern slavery. This call has New Zealand joining numerous other countries such as the U.K, Australia and Europe who have already enacted, or are in the process of drafting supply chain legislation.

The Warehouse Group has had an ethical sourcing programme in place for the past seventeen years and actively monitors, reports on, and drives continuous improvements in its supply factories. Chief Product Officer, Tania Benyon, says supply chains are complex and it is important that New Zealand keeps pace with the rest of the world in ensuring greater transparency and action.

"New Zealanders want to know that overseas workers who make their products are treated fairly. Introducing modern slavery legislation in New Zealand will encourage businesses to work collaboratively to raise standards and stamp out modern slavery from supply chains."

New Zealand consumers want to buy ethical products and Modern Slavery Acts make it easier for consumers to expect slavery-free products and services. They help prevent slavery through transparency and accountability. They require businesses to understand the modern slavery risks in their purchasing, report on those risks, and take action to address them. They give the business community guidance and a level playing field.

"We are part of a very interconnected global economy and social ecosystem," says Kathmandu CEO Reuben Casey. "It is therefore not a matter of whether New Zealanders are unknowingly supporting forms of Modern Slavery through their purchasing practices, but rather where this is happening and to what extent. Effectively addressing the risks of Modern Slavery will stand and fall on our ability to let go of our corporate egos and be transparent about our businesses, our supply chains and our shared humanity, all of which are very imperfect."

Modern slavery goes against our kiwi values. New Zealand's identity as a nation is built on kindness, fairness, equality, and sustainability.

"Our coffee passes through many hands before it reaches us so transparency between us and the producers in coffee-growing countries worldwide is important to us," says Head of L'affare Paul Cockburn. "The values of the L'affare brand (and the people behind L'affare) align with those of many NZ coffee businesses, in support of values-based business and in support of the meaningful measures this open letter speaks to."

This open letter demonstrates a growing impetus from the business community for the government to make good on its international commitment to investigate a Modern Slavery Act for New Zealand. Despite this action being referenced in its 2020 [National Draft Plan of Action against Forced Labour, People Trafficking and Slavery](#), no action has yet been taken. Internationally the government has made a commitment to consider introducing legislation requiring businesses to report publicly on transparency in supply chains, to eliminate practices of modern slavery in New Zealand and beyond its borders through the [Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights](#) in 2019.

The Open Letter is supported by Trade Aid, Walk Free and World Vision, who are joining New Zealand businesses in calling on the government to reflect New Zealand's values by progressing action towards a Modern Slavery Act.

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For more information, including media interview access, contact:

Gabriel Thomas, World Vision: Gabriel.Thomas@worldvision.org.nz | 021 360 098

Rachel Dewhurst, Trade Aid: Rachel@kinfellow.co.nz | 021 771 009

Ben Martin, Walk Free: Bemartin@minderoo.org | +61 427 366 531