

## **Moving BS 25700 to an International Standard: Combating Modern Slavery, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking**

### **Introduction**

On Sunday evening I landed at Hewanorra Airport and was picked up by Andy, a lovely local taxi driver who was taking me to my hotel at the north of the Island. On the hour and half journey to my base for the week, I was gifted my own personal guided tour. Did you know for example that the national bird of St Lucia is the St Lucia Amazon (A species of parrot) and that the national plant is bamboo? St Lucia has a population of 179,000 which is equal to the population of Ipswich.

The Island gained independence on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1979, up until that point the Island was contested regularly between the UK and France which saw the Island populations increase from 463 in 1730, including 175 slaves working on the emerging sugar plantations, to 19,230 in 1776, which included 16,003 slaves working on 40 plus sugar plantations. Slavery was made illegal in 1807 in the Caribbean regions but continued to operate under the radar as plantation owners put economic needs about the new laws. Sound familiar?

Apart from getting to see this beautiful island, there is a reason for this visit. I am here to attend the first committee meeting to create an international standard to address human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery – to be fair the title is still a work in progress.

As the British standard BS25700 was only launched this year, why is it so important that we have an international standard so quickly?

In a globalised world where supply chains are located across multiple borders, addressing the issues of modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking requires a unified and standardised approach. British Standard 25700 (BS 25700) is as a useful and important framework for organisations committed to combating these practices from their operations. But as organisations grapple with the increasing legislative landscape that is demanding more responsible procurement practices and ESG is calling for supply chain governance, the call for a more comprehensive and globally recognised system grows louder.

### **The Importance of International Standardization**

- **Global Collaboration and Consistency:** One of the primary reasons for moving BS 25700 to an international standard is to foster global collaboration. By aligning diverse industries and nations under a single framework, consistency in addressing modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking can be achieved. This uniformity is crucial in creating a concerted effort to eradicate these issues, ensuring that no region, wherever it is across the globe, becomes a haven for exploitative practices.
- **Enhanced Credibility and Trust:** An international standard based on BS 25700 can significantly enhance the credibility of organisations committed to ethical business practices. We know that implemented correctly, adopting a universally recognised standard can help organisations evidence their commitment and activities towards combatting slavery and trafficking, thus building trust among all their stakeholders, including customers, and investors.
- **Streamlined Compliance:** Businesses operating across borders face a complex web of regulations and standards. An international standard derived from BS 25700 simplifies the compliance landscape, offering a streamlined set of guidelines that organisations can adopt,

regardless of their geographical location. This simplification facilitates adherence and reduces the risk of oversight.

### **Challenges in the Transition**

So moving this standard to an international one sounds logical but why are the next 3 years going to be challenging?

- **Terminology Differences:** The terminology relating to modern slavery is different internationally. Modern Slavery is a phrase used consistently in the UK and Australia; in fact our legislative frameworks use that term. In Europe it is not a phrase that is understood and there is a greater emphasis on forced labour and human trafficking. Globally we are seeing an increase the use of term Human Rights which includes forced labour and other issues covered under the umbrella term modern slavery. Getting consensus on terminology and scope is going to be a very important and difficult part of the early days of the standard and will take a lot of patience and education amongst all the nations involved in pulling this standard together.
- **Differing National Regulations:** The regulations world is developing fast, and organisations are having to grapple with the different mechanisms required by countries to evidence their approach to identifying and addressing modern slavery in their supply chains. Some regulations are disclosure in nature such as in the UK, Australia, and Japan. Other regulations and legislation are demanding due diligence activity to be undertaken such as in the US and the EU. Striking a balance that accommodates diverse legal frameworks while maintaining the integrity of the standard is no easy task.
- **Understanding of Risk:** At organisational level risk is understood and forms part of a responsible business's governance structure. In most of the cases however risk is considered in terms of risk to the business whether it is financial and/or operational. But what about the risk to people? Whilst frameworks such as the UNGPs have been in place for decades which require organisations to consider the risk to people in their supply chains there is no framework yet in place that asks them to consider both views. This is a newer concept which leads an organisation to move to a double materiality approach to risk. Innovation and understanding emerging practices will be required if this standard can help organisations navigate this complex and emerging landscape.

### **Conclusion**

In producing this ISO standard, we are taking an important step toward combatting modern slavery, forced labour, and human trafficking on a global scale. While challenges exist, the potential benefits for business, including enhanced credibility, improved transparency, and positive brand image, make the transition imperative for businesses committed to ethical practices. More importantly, the benefits for people trapped in human trafficking and forced labour conditions is priceless.

Over the next 3 years we aim to help organisations and ultimately victims of these practices by providing a useful, pragmatic framework that will allow them to integrate antislavery, trafficking and forced labour activities into their operations allowing them to play an important role in creating a world where exploitation is no longer tolerated.