

Simon:

Modern slavery, it's a dark secret in business, taking a toll on too many lives, robbing them of human dignity. Part of the problem is that we don't want to look it squarely in the eye, to acknowledge that it exists, the conditions that create it, and together to dry the systemic change that will make modern slavery history. So where do we start and what can we do? How can you make sure your business isn't part of the problem? And how do we collaborate as companies and industries to bring dignity to all lives? It's a tough conversation, but a vital one. So let's talk about it.

From We First and Goal 17 Media. Welcome to Lead with We. I'm Simon Mainwaring, and each week I talk with purposeful business and thought leaders about the revolutionary mindsets and methods you can use to build your bottom line and a better future for all of us. And today I'm joined by Joanna Ewart-James, Executive Director and co-founder for Freedom United, the world's largest community dedicated to ending human trafficking and slavery. Joanna is also a trustee at Labour Behind the Label, a not-for-profit cooperative that supports garment workers efforts worldwide to improve their working conditions.

And we'll discuss the unseen and unconscionable issue of modern slavery in business and what we can do to address it and how together we can make progress to expose and end modern slavery through the collaboration of all stakeholders. So Joanna, welcome to Lead with We.

Joanna:

Thank you, great to be here.

Simon:

Now firstly, I want to start by saying huge respect for the work that Freedom United is doing in and around ending modern slavery. And I have to admit, when I heard the term, I have certain things that come to mind quite readily as many people do, but I don't think I understand the depths and nuance of the topic. So could you help us kind of understand what is modern slavery?

Joanna:

Yeah, absolutely. I think Simon, you're not the only one because the topic itself does sound a little archaic. One hopes that this is something from history that we don't have to be talking about today. And of course the term does come from history. The idea of owning another person for your benefit, people were treated as property. And now of course, most situations that's not possible. Legally speaking, you cannot own another person. Nevertheless, there are people who treat others as property to exploit them. And that is what we call modern slavery today.

Simon:

And give us a sense of how pervasive it is because does it skew largely female? Is it equally weighted between men and women? Is it in certain regions around the world? What does that footprint look like?

Joanna:

It's at the moment, the best estimates that we have are that they're around 50 million people living in conditions of modern slavery around the world. I would guess that that's an underestimate. It's really hard to know exactly how many people are in those conditions. As you say, it's pretty hidden. It's not very easy to actually establish what the real situation is. But those are estimates that the UN have accepted they've put out in collaboration with other organizations.

Interestingly, it does affect men and women fairly equally. In the past, the statistics suggested that it affected women more than men. About 70% of victims of modern slavery were women. But now that numbers believed to be more similar. Now clearly different forms of modern slavery affect addition circumstances in which it got exploited, affect one gender more than the others. And I think if I just give you a couple of examples, I'll give you an idea of what I'm talking about.

So for example, domestic servitude. So somebody who's working in a domestic setting who's being exploited in a way that they have no choice about, they are unable to leave, that affects women more than men, and then forced labor, especially in supply chains that produce some of the goods that we might be using, tends to affect men more. So there are definitely different forms of modern slavery that affect genders differently, but I think overall the numbers at the moment suggest that affects men and women fairly equally.

Simon:

And this may seem like a really strange question, Joanna, so tell me if I'm off base, but are there circumstances in which people, men or women, don't even realize that they're victims of modern slavery, they just feel like their lives are restricted in some way, but they don't realize that they actually have a case for kind of being, freed from these circumstances?

Joanna:

Well, I'm sure that is the case and despite the fact that as I mentioned before, that we think of slavery as being historical, the reality is, is that there is still historical examples of modern slavery today, what we might call chattel slavery, that we see particularly in Mauritania, they put a lot of work into ending the system of chattel slavery, but also in bonded labor systems. We see in South Asia, in Pakistan and India where in debt that was taken by a family member might be passed on to children and then passed on to children. And it gets to a situation where actually the original debt, I mean nobody have knowledge of the original debt, but still those people are working for someone.

And this is something we see particularly in specific industry such as the brick industry where people have just worked for generations and they have no concept even of what the debt is. So I think in those circumstances, knowing that actually you have a case against this employer, it just feels very removed. Consider it has been your whole life and your parents' life. So I think in those circumstances you can certainly imagine that what you are suggesting is the case.

Simon:

Right, help me understand when so many other issues related to business are so deeply scrutinized and sort of called out so readily by all stakeholders, whether it's consumers, employees, investors, suppliers. Why is modern slavery so unseen and why is it still a problem in today's world? What allows it to go unaddressed?

Joanna:

Well, that's a brilliant question that I've been asking myself for many years.

Simon:

Right.

Joanna:

Personally I am convinced that the reason is, that we just don't have a good understanding of what it is and as a society, and so we are just not holding ourselves to account. So if when I first started working on [inaudible 00:06:40] businesses were just surprise to him, even use this language, I usually talked about forced labor because modern slavery just felt so far removed.

Yes, if I went through some of the indicators of what that actually means, so things like workers not having access to their passports, so they're locked up for example, or workers are living onsite but not actually being able to leave that site because there's security at the door that stopped them from leaving or workers having their pay retained, not getting paid as they're doing the work or debts being, workers being in debt to their employer and being asked to pay excessive interest rates.

All those things were familiar to the businesses I was speaking to. They're like, oh yes. Well that's the kind of things that we look for when we are going to examine if this company should be our supplier or shouldn't be our supplier. They didn't put all those indicators or those red flags together and go, my goodness, that person, there's a high risk that they're living in a condition that's modern slavery.

So there's definitely an important part in solution, understanding what it is that we are talking about, how it emerges, and then being very clear that this is not, we won't tolerate it. And I think that is a really big part of the problem. And you combine that with some of the endemic discrimination that some communities face, especially migrant workers, you can see how it's actually permissible. And we don't have a society that's resilient to this form of exploitation. We just don't have enough awareness. We need a big drive and a push for everyone to go, wow, that's outrageous, that's not acceptable, we won't tolerate it.

Simon:

And what does my head in a bit Joanna and I've got to say is, we live in a time where appropriately so there is so much attention on how we treat employees and at companies of any size in the United States, in Europe and markets all around the world, especially in the context of the great resignation, quiet, quitting, all of these things that are going on and the sort of atrophy within company cultures over the course of the global pandemic.

So why is it any less important in terms of modern slavery in the supply chains of these companies? Because I mean it's such a greater risk that they're exposing themselves to. Is it because it's buried in those lower tiers of suppliers like tier 2, 3, 4, and five that are largely unseen and they're in markets that doesn't have the same media scrutiny? I mean, is that part of it?

Joanna:

Well, interesting that you say it's a great risk because I think really that is the crux of the matter. Is it a risk?

Simon:

Right.

Joanna:

It means for much of history it hasn't looked like much of a risk. In fact, what it does do is it really helps with one of the main objectives that many companies have and that is to achieve a good profit and a return to their shareholders. I know that sounds very cold, but I think that it's real. That's the big driving force. And we know very well that if we put standards in place and we can think of so many examples of products that have a very complex and long supply chain that still reach us in brilliant condition, we

know it's possible to do it. But ultimately when we have to squeeze or when there's a squeeze to maximize profit, labor is a really easy place to do it.

What are the chances of being prosecuted? Very low. What's the chances of being held to account? And when we didn't have a country with national legislation against modern slavery before the UK adopted the Modern Slavery Act in 2015, and even then it only requires companies to report about what's happening in the supply chain. There's no real penalty for modern slavery appearing in the supply chain. And as you say, it can often be buried.

I'm not suggesting that of course companies are just going off and pleasing modern slavery knowingly. But of course to get a good start to product, you have to be involved in offshoring production from the beginning to the end. And this is same with labor rights. You have to be proactive from the beginning to the end to be sure that your supply chain is a supply chain that doesn't include modern slavery.

Simon:

Right, and it's interesting, if you look at just capital and organizations over here in the United States across the board, the number one issue of concern for stakeholders is a fair and living wage, which is really about labor rights and the right to a livelihood and so on. And in similar ways, there should be a same premium place on the wellbeing of those in your supply chain.

So what does Freedom United do to start addressing an issue which is so inherently systemic? I mean it's built into supply chains, it's largely unseen. They're disincentivized to do anything about it because they just want the highest return to their shareholders. So what does Freedom United do and how does it approach as a complicated problem?

Joanna:

Freedom United's way of solving this, is I think filling a gap that's absolutely necessary. And that is to inform and build awareness and understanding of exactly what this looks like. Because I think the language, modern slavery often brings connotations of chains and historical traits that really aren't an accurate representation of what modern slavery looks like. And that's part of the reason why it is often overlooked, as I was giving the example earlier. Because if you don't have a good understanding of what it is, it's the kind of thing as you say, that could be right in front of you but you don't notice.

Simon:

Right of course.

Joanna:

Awareness, education, learning is a really cool part of it and we want to go a step further with that. That's not enough. We need to also be active and proactive in calling for change. We want the shift society's values. So we say very clearly that this, actually we won't tolerate this. And we do that by immobilizing our community behind specific campaigns and actions on particular cases of modern slavery. Now clearly we haven't picked up to do, as you say, it's endemic, it's cuts across so many issues, but there's a real opportunity like there has been with many other social issues that we've been facing in our recent times.

I think climate justice is a really good example. Women's rights, civil rights movement, they all show that we can make progress if we work collectively. So we need a mobilize and engage community of people who are saying, no, this is not acceptable that's what you need to do. Now what Freedom United does, is a platform that provides the opportunity for people to get involved to use their name and build power

amongst a whole load of other names that can actually be enough to change a status quo and get somebody to change their mind about what they're doing and about their practice. And I think that's really crucial.

If we don't each have enough people saying this isn't on, then we are just not going to be able to make change happen. And we also need at the center of that, people who've experienced modern slavery and who can really talk realistically about it.

Simon:

I mean with so many things, whether it's sustainability, whether it's carbon in the air, chemicals in the soil, plastics in the ocean, it's the weight of public opinion and the various stakeholders that really allows things to change. And so how do you mobilize community around this issue at Freedom United? Because as you say, the incentives aren't there to change the way things have been done for so long in business, especially when it's sort of upstream and out of sight. So what are you doing to put pressure on, for example, business more broadly to see the issue, address the issue and then mobilize communities to kind of demand for change?

Joanna:

I think if we really sit down and say, okay, I could offer you this product but it's been produced with exploitation and modern slavery or this product. And I can tell you that the workers who produced it are in good conditions. I mean I guess that you and many others and perhaps all those listening, would happily choose the product where the workers have been treated well throughout the supply chain.

Simon:

Right.

Joanna:

And one of the big questions of course is price. How much is price and factor in that? I think price is definitely a factor, but there's definitely no guarantee if you pay a higher price that working conditions are good. I use that example because unfortunately we don't get that choice. For the most part, we don't have the opportunity to make the selection based on conditions in supply chains. So we are in a very disempowered position as consumers, our society, but also to an extent businesses, because if you don't look, of course, you don't really know what you're doing, what's happening rather and as you mentioned, it's often quite far down the chain.

I want to give you one example of campaign that we really works hard on and driven performance, which is about children trafficked into orphanages. It's recorded as a problem in quite a few countries, where children are literally trafficked to fill up an orphanage in order to track foreign donations. And one of the big sources of foreign donations as volunteers. So you might have heard of volunteerism. So the idea of take, I mean especially common I think for younger people on spring break or what have you, to look for opportunities to travel abroad and they'll fundraise and they might want to go work in an orphanage and it all seems like very altruistic, but actually they're that perpetuating a business model that encourages orphanage owners to exploit children. And there's some really horrific examples you might imagine.

So we started our campaign calling on these volunteerism companies to remove orphanage placements from their offering. And I have to say, the first response that we got was just a brick wall. There's real shock and no, of course this is a good thing. What we're actually doing is promoting volunteering, we're

trying to support communities and quite understandably, some of the responses were just absolute silence or very defensive. Now a couple of companies did say, this is something we're aware of but we're not sure about, is this really such a big issue? And we engaged for some time with these businesses and we have throughout our campaign managed to get couple of these volunteerism companies to actually change their practice. So there's three doing a great job.

There's Global Vision International, there's African Impact, and there's Go Overseas. Go Overseas has got a new system on their website that actually flags the harms of volunteering and orphanages against any opportunity in an orphanage and explains what the risks are. And that's the kind of thing that we need to do because I don't for a minute suggest that somebody going off to do volunteerism is knowing that they're going to be part of this type of exploitation. So I think for the most part this is just the lack of information and the lack of your knowledge and that's what we're seeking to do for you to build that knowledge, fill that gap, and set those standards.

Simon:

And if you're a business of any size listening to this podcast, help us understand what we can do, what questions we can ask what sort of lens we can look through with our suppliers to start to identify whether this issue is a problem. Because often we don't know, it's just our products are being manufactured offshore or by the time they arrive to you there's been so many steps on the way you don't know what's happened further upstream. So what are a few key questions that we might be able to ask to sort of see if that's, might be a problem?

Joanna:

I think the first step to do is to just do a risk assessment and look at what the products are or the services are that you are providing and to try and ascertain where the risk is highest. So how do we do that? Well, a couple of ways. One is to think about peak of workers are particularly vulnerable. So we know for example, that migrant workers in low paid work, especially low skilled work, are often more vulnerable than say migrant workers that are well paid and skilled work or other workers. So that would be an area of concern. It subcontracting of course, do you really know what the conditions all the workers are in?

And then from a products point of view, you could look at [map.freedomunited.org](http://map.freedomunited.org) which shows the different products that are produced with the highest sense of modern slavery around the world and use that map as a tool to say, okay, we know we source products X from this country and looking at [map.freedomunited.org](http://map.freedomunited.org), we can see that product is produced with a high risk saving. So that's something that we should look into.

And I say that's a starting point now I don't think that we are saying that any proactive work is a good thing, so we're certainly not interested in discouraging companies by finding something that then leads to something else. And then of course there is a concern that you find more things that's a responsible way of doing things. Just looking and not finding anything would be surprising to me. I think the businesses, you know you have to go into this expecting to find problems. So I think we can gather news, we can educate ourselves, we can learn about the way modern slavery emerges.

Risk assessment, absolutely number one. And then starting to dive into those supply chains asking questions of, it's not enough to ask the supply to sign a code of conduct, but actually go visit them, is what they're producing, does it look what you are seeing in front of you? Does it look like has the capacity to produce what you're asking, asking it to produce? Or could there be some legal subcontracting for example that's happening? Are they transparent and clear about what else is

happening? Can you partner up with other businesses that might be sourcing from a similar place and learn from them? I think there's a lot of things that you can do to take an active step on this for sure.

Simon:

I scratch my head sometimes because in certain industries there's so much scrutiny around this. If you think of the footwear and apparel industry, you've got things like fair trade and you've got the independent audit that companies do with their own supply chains all the way down to tier four, tier five, and yet still there is modern slavery out there. How does it get through? Is it the illegal contractors? Is it sort of saying one thing and doing another? How can we better be airtight in our regulation of this issue?

Joanna:

Yeah, I mean airtight still feels some way off, no doubt. I think unless you are managing your entire supply chain from say the field where maybe you go cotton to the shop where you sell the product, it isn't impossible, but on a big scale it's very difficult. On a small scale, I think it is very possible that you can achieve that. So I think it is durable. I think re-engineering it backwards is definitely more difficult and building a company with that in mind and ensuring you have those good systems and with partnerships with local groups so you're not just relying on say, audit, but you are also right, getting the intelligence from local communities about what's actually happening with workers in those communities. I think that can be incredibly powerful in telling. But of course if you really do invest in your whole supply chain and your process and your workers, then you are a much less of a risk than you are and for those who are not, but of course the way you do business is really important too.

So having really good purchasing practices, so for example, working with the same suppliers, not chopping in changing so you know who they are, making sure the orders are suitable for the capacity of the place that you are giving them. Also checking, see if any sort of subcontracting, as you say that shouldn't happen, of course. Making sure that you give enough time that you don't change the order late in the process and lot of paying timely for the work. It's just tragic knowing that mean this is not necessary of course a labor issue, but it's tragic to think of the amount of companies that canceled their audience when the pandemic hit and they never paid the suppliers for that work even been done leading to so many factory closures and then workers laid off without any pay, even though the goods have been produced. So responsible approach to purchasing practices is really important part of the solution.

Simon:

Yeah, no, I want to play devil's advocate here because I mean business is so hard these days. We've got the slow session, we've got inflationary pressure, we've got downward pressure on the stock market and none of that is in any shape or form an excuse that justifies treating people without human dignity. At the same time, if you are an entrepreneur who doesn't have a clear line of sight as to what's going on in the labor practices of their suppliers and then they talk to the supplier about it and the supplier says, Hey, this is going to cost you X amount more on the dollar, fill the unit price of your product, or this is how things are done where we are. And an appeal just to their good conscience doesn't work. Is there anything you might suggest to us to what they might be able to say to their suppliers to kind of inspire or motivate them to do something differently?

Joanna:

Yeah, I think we can't just rely on someone's wish to treat people or the way we expect them to be treated. We have to be really proactive in ensuring that the standards that are one our consumers expect but also the international law sets out are actually met. I'm sure that you hear all sorts of reasons as to why this exploitation might happen. And one that I hear that I find is a good example of that is in a lot of cultures it's quite common to pay for a job and the good practice according to the UN international labor organization, you should never pay for a job, right?

Yet I have heard responsible recruitings attempting to recruit workers. In this case it was from [inaudible 00:25:07] to the Gulf and when the workers hadn't paid takers take up the job, nobody turned up because they felt the job's not real. So of course there are some, I don't question that there are some challenges in making their share, but ultimately as businesses, as buyers, as consumers, we have influence and power that we can exercise in how we work and how we do business. And I think it's on us all to make clear what those standards are and make sure that they're followed.

Simon:

And you see this in both the UK and the US. I mean you see it with Tony's Chocolonely in the UK and you see what Ben and Jerry's out here in the US. Both have independently committed to ending child slavery and slavery more broadly in the cocoa supply chain and now are working together creating flavors and things together, to that end. Have you found that these corporate campaigns that raise awareness and engagement around these issues work and they address the issue and they help the brands? What's your experience with that?

Joanna:

Yeah, I think it's great where the companies are just really outspoken about the challenges they face in their supply chain and they definitely commend Tony's Chocolonely for doing just that and they are famous in saying that we produced a chocolate bar made with slavery. And I think that's exactly, that's the reality. Let's not try and pretend that otherwise we have to raise awareness of what's going on because we need to create a will to do something about it and we need to be really working together. There's no reason I think why any of us should feel that workers are paid very poorly in the cocoa sector. Child labor still is a real issue for sure in the cocoa sector. Why shouldn't it be? I think we should just speak clear about this is just not acceptable and we just won't tolerate it. And I think being outward spoken about it, not trying to hide it and being brave to say yes, this is a real issue and this is the things we're doing to try and solve it is a really important part of tackling it in a meaningful way.

Simon:

And I know you have a unique business model at Freedom United where you kind of partner with a network of organizations around the world and then you mobilize communities around the issues. Can you speak to that because I think all of us think it's terrible that this issue still exists, but we also kind of ring our hands thinking it is such a complicated issue and it's so widespread, so you need a systemic solution as well? So what does that pattern of impact look like from Freedom United?

Joanna:

Freedom United works with communities and mobilizes those communities to come together and speak out. Where we really can work well is where we have an issue that really resonates with us personally. Right now we only work on one topic, modern slavery, but funny enough, it's a topic that emerges in many different ways in many parts of the world. Just the idea of I'm a woman, I don't like the idea of other women taking up jobs where they're being exploited in domestic servitude. There's ways in which



we can come together around those issues and if we come together and work as a united front, we can have enough power to create change. And that's what we are doing.

Simon:

And one of the things that I'm perplexed about is we have so much sophisticated tracking technology these days where we can track every zipper and every button in inventory through a supply chain irrespective of what industry or product. How come we can't do a better job of tracking pay scales and human trafficking and all of these other issues which seem to be so alive in the Americas, in Europe and Asia and so on? Why can't we use blockchain and inventory management and labor practices to kind of get a better sense of what's going wrong?

Joanna:

I mean, I say it's possible, definitely it might be, we obviously not set up for that. We set up our systems to ensure the quality of the product. As you say, the origin of the different parts are not around label conditions. So there is a shift. This would require a shift in the way that the business is operated, but I think it is entirely possible to do that and so that we can have a better picture. And I certainly know there are some major retailers, you've expressed to me an interest in consumers being able to scan a code by a product and to be able to see information about worse conditions in that product supply chain rather than just seeing country of origin, which we're very familiar with.

Simon:

Right, and what can a company do, even if it's a small company to work with its customers, its consumers, to make a difference and raise awareness in these issues? Give us a few ideas that have you seen work to engage your broader brand community to take on the issue?

Joanna:

I think it's the first thing has to be really open and companies should be transparent about what it is that they're concerned about in the company. I think what we can look at for good examples are some of the statements that have been submitted under the UK Modern Slavery Act that require companies to state what efforts they're doing to address modern slavery. And they're providing that information for their consumer to read and understand. And I think ultimately the consumers should have that information at hand. But I question whether the onus is on the consumer to ensure that that's actually put into practice.

In my opinion, this is legislation that's set rigs clearly at the international level enforced at national level by different governments and the onus is our companies to ensure that they are adhering to that legislation. And of course it helps without a doubt for consumers to say, this is what we want and this is what we want to see. But I'm not suggesting that companies should wait on consumers to be asking them about all the different supply chain risks or that consumers should be the ones that are creating change because clearly that's, it's just not possible. I mean, as you say, these supply chains is long and complex. We definitely need to have knowledge about it, we need to have awareness about it.

If we don't, we're not able to hold each other to account. We're not able to say that that just doesn't make sense, that just doesn't add up. That just doesn't sound realistic and we need to have that knowledge to hold each other to account, but it's a math societal issue and transparency is what part of, but what we really need to see is proactive and due diligence on the part of companies and that's

actually a campaign that we're working on at the moment to get in place mandatory, due diligence or corporate action to ensure that they are not abusing human rights or the environment.

Simon:

Yeah, I mean the whole premise of Lead with We, is that we all work together to solve these very complex issues, but also we do it in the service of everyone equally. And the wellbeing of a few kind of come at the expense of the suffering or indignity of so many. And so there's that other side to the coin of it and we've talked about the preventative aspect and how you can look upstream and really work with your suppliers to adopt and sustain better practices. What about the remedial situation when you have help folks out of modern slavery, how are they integrated back into society? How are they supported so that they can sort of break that cycle that has defined their life?

Joanna:

Absolutely, I think remediation is a really important part of the jigsaw and I think it also shows as well how serious we are about tackling this issue. And it's often a part that's, to be honest, it's neglected and it doesn't get the commitment or the attention that it deserves. We really want to see companies making sure that workers are paid for the work they've done. And so factories are receiving payments for orders they've completed. Whether or not those orders then go ahead and reach the market, the bus on a big scale.

But from a modern slavery point of view, absolutely it's imperative that individuals do have the opportunity to not only receive compensation, which to be honest is incredibly rare. We don't see very many examples of it, but also they can have the opportunity to secure justice in the situation of exploitation. And it's, unfortunately that isn't happening in the way that it should be happening, even at governmental level. So we are seeing individuals who've been trafficked to countries and treated as reaching immigration rules while than as victims like modern slavery. So we still have a long way to go, to get there. But I agree with you that I think it's a really important part of the jigsaw of what the future that we really want the team looks like.

Simon:

Right, and I mean what makes you optimistic about how we're addressing this issue? The role business can play, how we can change? Because if it was simple to solve, it wouldn't still be here because we've got so many affluent countries, we've got so much scrutiny around how business is behaving and yet we still have an issue like this that's too under the radar and too pervasive. So despite that, what makes you optimistic about how we can solve for this, especially through business?

Joanna:

Yeah, I think we can look at a couple of examples that have shown us that actually we can mobilize action and really say this is not okay and we can create change. Let me talk to you a little bit about Uzbekistan. Now that's a country that feels very far removed I expect for many listeners as well as you and I, but actually it is one of the largest producers of cotton. I suspect that perhaps most people listening are wearing an item with cotton right now. Now of course we can't say for sure that that's cotton from Uzbekistan, but you can see that for sure within the wardrobe, there's a really strong likelihood that cotton from Uzbekistan is it's directly connected to our lives.

I first started to working on this issue when the government of Uzbekistan was mobilizing a million of its citrus zones every year into the cotton field, both for preparation and for harvesting. Now on that kind

of scale, you can just imagine who it affected. It affected even professionals, nurses, doctors are taken out of hospitals and sent to the field. Teachers and whole classes were sent to the cotton field. They slept in cotton fields in poor conditions, didn't eat particularly well because it was a nuptual effort and the only way could get out of it would be by paying a fee. So there was definitely an element of coercion.

Now this I've mentioned affected the power supply chain and we mobilized hundreds of businesses to sign a pledge to not knowingly source cotton from Uzbekistan. That created some really useful economic and political leverage on the government of Uzbekistan. So when the leader of the country changed, this was a issue that they could pick up and say, okay, we're going to do something about this. We don't want our client to be seen as tainted. We want to have access to the international market. This is an important source of revenue for the government and it's because of the coming together of business.

It's saying that we don't accept this. Then last March we were able to declare that this system of state sponsors forced labor had ended. I'm giving you an absolute summary of a very long process. There were a lot of outside business, there were some amazingly impressive monitors working secretly in its best time telling us exactly what was happening, reporting from the field directly. But it's a great example, that yes change can happen. We just need to create will to make it happen. And that goes to show that yes, it's possible.

Simon:

Thank you so much, Joanna. I have to say, I just want to share on behalf of everyone listening, enormous respect for the leadership at Freedom United is taking on this issue. I mean it is front and center to the E S G commitments and all the dialogue around that in the business world and also for inspiring us and showing us how that each one of us in our whatever size, our companies can ask the right questions to make sure that we're not complicit in the problems. So thank you for the insights today. And if we were looking to support Freedom United and its work, what can people do?

Joanna:

Oh, thank you for asking. I mean, we are all about our community. Freedom United wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the community of people that we have on the other end ready to mobilize when an opportunity emerges. So how you be part of that community, sign up for all our newsletter or sign a campaign on our website, [freedomunited.org](http://freedomunited.org). And of course we also welcome donations and subscriptions because we are independent an organization and so we rely very much on individual donations. But be a part of the community. Join us and make clear that you don't think modern slavery is acceptable and we should have it today.

Simon:

Well, this is such an issue that we can all Lead with We on together and thank you to you and your team around the world for all that you're doing, thanks.

Joanna:

Thanks so much for the opportunity Simon, I really appreciate it.

Simon:

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