

Submission to the Select Committee on the Modern Slavery Act 2015

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES FORCED CHILD LABOUR



Lara Kaput

24 March 2024

“They call their churches Kingdom Halls, and they are built using congregants' labour and donations. The labour is unpaid and, I understand, at times includes the labour of children. They derive money from deceased estates bequeathed to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society by convening district conventions and circuit assemblies, and through the sale of real estate, which appears to have escalated since the royal commission in Australia and inquiries into their organisations in other countries. Their wealth is estimated in billions, not millions, of dollars.”¹

As quoted by the Honourable Tony Zappia MP for the anniversary of the Australian National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse

¹ <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/c4ab46e1-15d4-4e92-970f-0a08926f67b5/&sid=0210>



Chair: Baroness O'Grady of Holloway
Select Committee on the Modern Slavery Act
House of Lords
London SW1A OPW

via email: hlmodernslaveryact@parliament.uk

RE: Submission to the Inquiry on the Modern Slavery Act 2015 | Jehovah's Witnesses Forced Child Labour (Modern Slavery)

Dear Chair,

I make this submission to you on behalf of UK children who are coerced into forced child labour by the Jehovah's Witnesses. I have adapted this report from my recent Australian submission to the *Inquiry into Modern Slavery Act 2018 and Associated Matters*², and it advises the UK government on concerns within the Jehovah's Witnesses community, building on those raised in the UK *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* (IICSA) and the Charity Commission for England and Wales.

These child abuse and human rights topics have been regularly highlighted within the media, in relation to the religion of Jehovah's Witness Church, its administrative management corporation, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain, the International Bible Students Association (IBSA), their controlling parent organisation Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, Inc., and the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The primary concern for this Inquiry, are allegations that the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses actively commit modern slavery via coercion of up to 3.3 million children globally, including estimates of 52,166 in Britain, through seven main types of labour:

- Babysitting,
- Construction and labouring,
- Cleaning,
- Food preparation,
- Gardening,
- Selling literature, and
- Recruitment of new members

Yours sincerely,
Larissa (Lara) Kaput

² <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/83068/0017%20Larissa%20Kaput.pdf>>

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Summary

I allege that am one of an estimated **3.26 million survivors of forced child labour** in a global cohort that hasn't been widely recognised or acknowledged. In this scenario, myself and all the children I knew were coerced to partake in at least seven types of forced child labour. We have estimated that there are **approximately 52,165 British Jehovah's Witness forced child labourers**.

I am also a recently retired Procurement expert (20+ years) and understand the relationship between modern slavery and the supply chain. However, it should be noted that there is negligible relationship between the supply chain and modern slavery within the Jehovah's Witnesses.

From my lived experience, observations of others and via a recent petition that I initiated³, I allege that Jehovah's Witness boys and girls were subjected to forced child labour by coercion. If you didn't participate, you could be punished. If your parents didn't participate, they could be reprimanded ("marked" or "reproved"). If you didn't participate as a family, it was unusual and you faced being looked upon as being "spiritually weak".

Even today, approximately all 8 million Jehovah's Witnesses are holding each other's family, and friends, emotionally, financially and psychologically hostage. Threats of disfellowshipping (excommunication) is ever-present once you're baptised into the Jehovah's Witnesses, as many of us were as children. Disfellowshipping results in shunning, despite recent changes to imply the contrary. "Unless they are reinstated, this punishment is for the remainder of their life, causing tremendous emotional suffering."⁴

When I was little, we learned about how you can and should lie to protect Jehovah and the Watch Tower Society. As an adult I learned that this is a formal doctrinal teaching and policy called 'theocratic warfare'⁵. This means we didn't have to tell the whole truth to authorities to protect Jehovah's people. The coercive threat of shunning underpins all forced labour within the Jehovah's Witnesses⁶. Coercion involving fear, obligation and guilt (FOG) via theocratic warfare keeps them and their parents silent.

Jehovah's Witnesses use coercion to force labour: it's modern slavery. In summary:

1. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is not effective for Jehovah's Witnesses modern slaves. Impacts of recent legislation has not affected this.
2. Due to the lack of understanding of this cohort, developments in modern slavery and human trafficking have been equally ineffective.
3. The efficacy of the provisions of the Act relating to supply chains are not relevant for Jehovah's Witnesses modern slaves.
4. The efficacy of the other key provisions of the Act are either not effective or not relevant for Jehovah's Witnesses modern slaves.
5. The role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner is not sufficiently resourced.
6. Suggestions for improvements are provided within this submission.

³ <<https://www.change.org/p/end-child-forced-labour-in-the-jehovah-s-witnesses-estimated-to-affect-3-3-million-kids>>

⁴ <<https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/disfellowship-shunning.php>>

⁵ <<https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/quotes/theocratic-warfare-lying.php>>

⁶ <<https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/disfellowship-shunning.php>>

Estimates of 52,166 forced child labourers within the Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain and 3.3 million globally

How were these numbers estimated?

Global estimate - children

Within a global membership of 8.7 million⁷ people today, we can similarly assume that two thirds or 17.4 million have left. If 26.1 million (8.7 million + 17.5 million) current and former Jehovah's Witnesses remain alive, a maximum of 6.5 million are children. If half of these are born in, we can estimate the number of global forced child labourers as approximately **3.3 million***.

Global estimate – adults

If we assume that, approximately 26.1 million (8.7 million + 17.5 million) current and former Jehovah's Witnesses are alive, of which ~75% of which are adults, then the likely maximum adults are **19.6 million*** (75% x 26.1 million).

UK estimate

In the 2011 Census, there were 63,073 people in England and Wales, 8,543 in Scotland and 1,728 in Northern Ireland who identified as Jehovah's Witnesses, a total of 73,344 in the UK.

Currently the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that they have 139,106 publishers in Britain and 7,341 in Ireland⁸. **Using the current British numbers only**, then if 417,318 (139,106 + 278,212) current and former Jehovah's Witnesses remain alive, a maximum of 104,330 are children (25% x 417,318). If half of these are born in, we can estimate the number of **British** Jehovah's Witness forced child labourers as approximately **52,165***.

Although it may be argued that all Jehovah's Witnesses might be considered forced labourers^{9,10}, for the purposes of this submission, I have focussed on the forced child labour only.

* Note: included are the maximum numbers. This requires further investigation and it depends on which of the five types of labour were are referring to and which legal entities were, or are, involved (e.g., corporate publishing and/or construction entities, or religious congregations).

⁷ <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/>> (accessed 23 November 2023)

⁸ <<https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2022-Service-Year-Report-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses-Worldwide/2022-Country-and-Territory-Reports/>>

⁹ <<https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/donations-money-solicitation.php#Donation%20of%20Labour>>

¹⁰ <<https://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/donations-money-solicitation.php#L3>>

Seven types of forced child labour within the Jehovah's Witnesses

My original submission to the Australian *Inquiry into Modern Slavery Act 2018 and Associated Matters*¹¹ in 2018 described that we had to:

1. participate in general construction labour. For example, cleaning bricks on church property (Kingdom Halls) for 'quick build' building sites, or helping to build roads on church property sites (Assembly Halls);
2. clean properties (Assembly Halls, Convention sites and Kingdom Halls);
3. prepare food for sale at large meetings (Assemblies and Conventions);
4. go from door-to-door, selling church literature ("witnessing"); and
5. constantly proselytise to non-Jehovah's Witnesses to attract new members (also "witnessing").

Since that submission was made, I created a petition on change.org entitled *End Child Forced Labour in the Jehovah's Witnesses*¹². Through the comments on this petition, I also discovered that other children also had to:

6. babysit other children, and
7. participate in gardening on church properties (Assembly Halls and Kingdom Halls).

I was one of the millions of Jehovah's Witness children allegedly used as forced child labourers globally, by religious leaders and Jehovah's Witness corporations. Parents and children are still coerced by church leaders to undertake these types of activities today. Due to time constraints, and your request to keep submissions brief, I have not focused on the subjection of Jehovah's Witness adults to modern slavery, though I allege that we can assume that virtually all adult Jehovah's Witnesses are forced labourers.

Membership for children of Jehovah's Witness congregation charities in Australia, and likely in Britain (which could be confirmed with qualified advice), is cognizant upon the child engaging in property maintenance on buildings and property. These buildings and property are not owned by the congregation but owned by other legal entities acting under the control of the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, US.

Despite this, and that in 2018 I made the above published parliamentary submission, there is minimal in the Modern Slavery ACT 2015 that related to our cohort. Nor did any subsequent marketing of the new legislation allude to the possibility of this happening in a high control religion. Exploiting religious beliefs as a means of human trafficking has been exposed before¹³, but not in a Jehovah's Witness context. Australian Federal Attorney-General the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP stated at our *National Modern Slavery Conference 2023*: "To stop Modern Slavery, we need engagement and partnership"¹⁴. Yet, United Kingdom Jehovah's Witnesses modern slavery survivors have not, as yet, had a seat at the table.

¹¹ <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/65890/0023%20Ms%20Larissa%20Kaput.pdf>>

¹² <<https://www.change.org/p/end-child-forced-labour-in-the-jehovah-s-witnesses-estimated-to-affect-3-3-million-kids>>

¹³ <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2050303216676520>>

¹⁴ <<https://ministers.ag.gov.au/media-centre/speeches/national-modern-slavery-conference-2023-29-06-2023>>

1. Babysitting

Evidence of historic forced child labour - Angela Rodger's Story (Scotland)

"Thinking back to the early 1990's, I remember wearing a hard hat whilst a 'quick build' was happening at our local Kingdom Hall. I was amazed at how quickly this building went up, carpets laid, curtains hung, etc. I worked on the Cathcart, Kingspark and Mt Florida in Glasgow build. I was around 11 - 12 years old.

I remember putting some sort of concrete mix between bricks, pushing a wheelbarrow with bricks in it to bring to someone working on laying the bricks with no formal bricklaying qualifications. I also helped to babysit a very young baby, around 5-6 months old on site. There were around 15-16 young people during that build there, ranging from ages 0-18.

This is of course not to mention the peddling of magazines at people's doorsteps where the going rate of the Watchtower was 25p and the Awake was 20p but both could be bought for 30p. That was in the 1980's and they scrapped the asking for money part of door-to-door field service, replacing the speech instead to simply "a donation".

I did the Pre-Convention between 1991-1996/7. I was again, a young child/teen. In 1991, I am sure it was Murrayfield and thereafter it was at St Johnstone's grounds in Perth. Cleaning the bird muck off the seats, mopping those 'flooming' concrete stairs. I remember running around and skipping off out of work a few times with other young "brothers and sisters" under the stadium seats. That was probably the only fun we ever had, until caught.

I wasn't baptised until 1985.

If any other information is required, I can certainly give it out."

- Angela Rogers

2. General building construction labour

Many Kingdom Hall 'quick-builds' (churches) were done in the name of a local Jehovah's Witness builder or the congregation. After deceptive recruiting, families are coerced to donate cash, resources (including construction equipment, land, materials, and tools), and their time (labour). The child construction workers were originally told that they were the beneficiaries, but this proved to not be the case when the US-based governing body seized the assets in 2011-2013¹⁵. They had coerced congregants to transfer property asset ownership in a number of countries by forcing a public vote in unison where there was no choice but to comply. The real estate sales were discussed on BBC Radio 4 in interviews with former Jehovah's Witnesses from four countries - Mr Adam Phillips (South Africa), Mrs Kim Brooks (United States), Mr Steven Unthank (Australia) and Mr John Viney (Wales), and with UK lawyer, Mr Alan Collins, and US and UK-registered lawyer, Ms Kathleen Hallisey¹⁶.

¹⁵ <<https://jwleaks.org/2013/10/02/watchtower-society-scandal-involving-menlo-park-congregation-of-jehovahs-witnesses/>>

¹⁶ <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000kww2>>

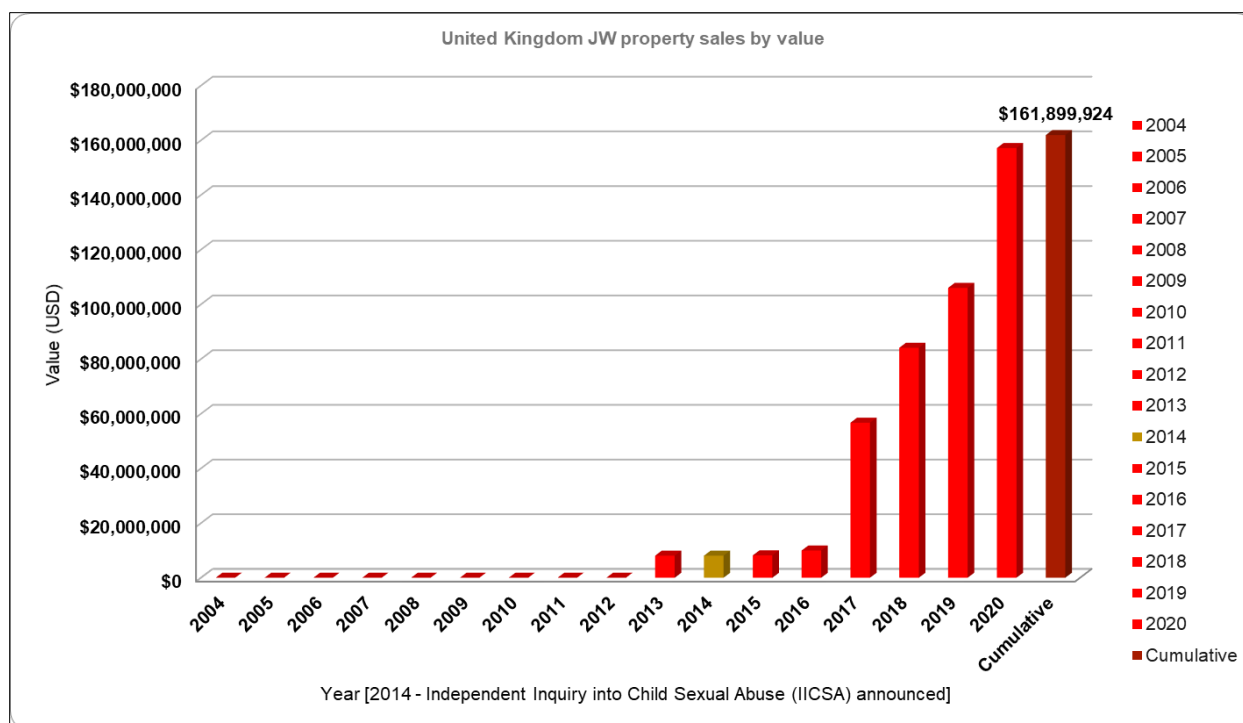


Figure 1: Jehovah’s Witness Property Sales in the UK

Figure 1 shows that sales in the UK started after the Australian *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* was announced in late 2012. UK property sales started trending exponentially two years after the UK’s *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* (IICSA) was announced. In 2019, property sales quickened after the IICSA investigation expanded to include religious organizations and settings, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses. A UK redress scheme is expected.

Evidence of historic forced child labour – Assembly Hall

We have extensive documented photographic and video evidence of children used as labourers on Kingdom Hall construction sites which can be supplied upon request. Refer also, to the stories of Angela Rogers and John Viney, within this submission.

Figure 2 shows my father and I, building a road in the red soil in Australia. There are other photos with lots of children, including my childhood friends, cleaning bricks. We were working-class kids; it was hard work. My mother was a child-indoctrinated Jehovah’s Witness and my father joined as a young, lost adult. He has (undiagnosed) Asperger’s syndrome. Our parents believed we all needed to work to save ourselves and other people for a future ‘Paradise on Earth’ - made up exclusively from members of our religious group. I remember shovelling with Dad and stomping my feet in small grid patterns on the ground to flatten the earth under the road base. There’s a look of pure determination and focus on his face and although I didn’t enjoy the work, I just wanted to spend time with him.



Figure 2: Lara Kaput (child in foreground) working on the construction at Melton Assembly Hall

Evidence of historic forced child labour - global

Commonwealth congregants are used as missionaries to ‘train’ children and young people in foreign countries to, for example, participate in construction work. United Kingdom children, who grew up as forced child labourers, become young adults who then unwittingly export slave-like behaviour by soliciting forced child labourers in third world countries, using Commonwealth countries as a staging post. An interview with a former leader, describes how he was manipulated, became a leader, and travelled to places including Japan, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Thailand and then was hunted down when he tried to leave the Jehovah’s Witnesses¹⁷.

3. Cleaning

Historic forced child labour – Kingdom and Assembly Halls

When I was a child Jehovah’s Witness, there was an expectancy pathway to clean Jehovah’s Witness facilities. I remember cleaning the toilets at my local Kingdom Hall. I think there was a roster and I was invited to be part of it by my bible study mentor. Refer also, to the stories of Angela Rogers and John Viney, within this submission.

Evidence of current forced child labour - global

In June 2023, a Jehovah’s Witness video showing recent propaganda featuring one of the new Jehovah’s Witness Governing Body leaders, Jeffrey Winder. In the video, two children are cleaning the podium and a table in a Kingdom Hall (minute 18:02), then two more young girls are cleaning chairs in other Kingdom halls (minute 18:09 and 18:21), and then a boy is being indoctrinated to clean the floor (minute

¹⁷ <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2Xzs9OYhjAQFvp2bey42eI>>

18:23).¹⁸



Figure 3: Two children working as child slave labourers



Figure 4: A young girl working as a child slave labourer

¹⁸ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMtq8CthL8s&pp=QAFIAQ%3D%3D>>



Figure 5: Another young girl cleaning as a child slave labourer



Figure 6: A young boy being indoctrinated to clean by a Jehovah's Witness adult

4. Food preparation

Evidence of historic forced child labour

When I was a child Jehovah's Witness, there was an expectancy pathway, primarily for female congregants, to prepare food for Jehovah's Witness events. I remember preparing food for an assembly. I was invited to be part of it by my bible study mentor.

Due to time constraints, I haven't detailed the evidence for food preparation by UK children however I am aware that evidence is available in survivor children's diaries, corporate and religious records and samples can be supplied upon request. Refer also, to the story of Angela Rogers within this submission.

5. Gardening

Evidence of historic forced child labour

When I was a child Jehovah's Witness, we lived next door to the Kingdom Hall on Athol Street in Springvale South. The entire congregation, including myself were expected to undertake gardening of both the Kingdom Hall and the carpark area at the front of our rented house.

Due to time constraints, I haven't detailed the evidence for gardening by UK children however I am aware that evidence is available in survivor children's diaries, corporate and religious records and samples can be supplied upon request. Refer also, to the stories of Angela Rogers and John Viney, within this submission.

6. Literature sales ("witnessing")

Evidence of historic forced child labour

Literature was sold by "witnessing" children going from door-to-door, and via other methods such as approaching people including school friends, both in private and public settings, until around the year 2000. We would attend the Theocratic Ministry school and become highly trained in literature sales, just like vacuum salespeople. On the weekends, we would get dressed up as a family, fill our bags with literature including the Watchtower and Awake! magazines, and go to try to sell them from door-to-door. We would meet with a congregation group with local maps and we would be sent out in different directions. Some of us kids would have to work alone with creepy adults from the congregation. We would often be out for about 4 hours on Saturdays and Sundays. We mostly hated it. Physical discipline would often be used to force children like my friends out in the sales 'ministry'.

Children (unbaptised publishers) were coerced by the Jehovah's Witnesses and Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia Limited to sell their literature without remuneration. There is a lot of history in Watch Tower publications that provide evidence that selling of literature was for financial gain¹⁹. To avoid tax this practice was stopped²⁰ and was instead replaced by ever-increasing requests for more cash²¹.

I am aware that evidence is available in survivor children's diaries, corporate and religious records and samples can be supplied upon request.

Evidence of historic forced child labour - John Viney's Story (Wales)

"Jehovah's Witnesses place great emphasis on having children "in subjection". From the age of around five, I was taken around by parents and other preaching members and was encouraged to participate in door-to-door discussions including holding Watchtower & Awake magazines face forward so the householder could see them. As a young boy, I went with my JW father and

¹⁹ <<https://jwfacts.com/watchtower/donations-money-solicitation.php>>

²⁰ <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-03-10-ca-1891-story.html>>

²¹ <<https://donate.jw.org/ui/E/donate-home.html>>

others to take part in what was called 'street work'. This was standing still in prominent busy shopping areas and holding up magazines, again face forward, and shouting out "Read the Watchtower & Awake, only hope for mankind." I remember the embarrassment and tedious schedule these preaching sessions caused, hoping not to ever meet school friends! Especially when a special preaching event was on Christmas Day, I knew many of the occupants would be unhappy about being disturbed. They also said that children should "not be out doing this kind of thing. "

My schedule included Saturday mornings going door to door, and 'learning ' presentations so that when the door was opened, I could engage and show the tracts or magazines to people. Saturday afternoon was the 'street work' activity. Sunday morning was regular door-to-door preaching for at least two hours, and Tuesday evening also, we engaged in what was called "pre-group activity", more house-to-house visits before a home Bible Study meeting. There were many other activities involving myself and other children that we were required to do. Cleaning of the Kingdom Hall every week. This was stressed to be viewed as a 'privilege' to be allowed to actively clean, polish, sweep and whatever was needed to keep the Hall presentable for worship. My own experience of the above started at age five and carried on way past seventeen. The larger conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses involved children in cleaning stadiums, campgrounds and car parks to facilitate the gatherings normally lasting up to seven days.

To understand the above, it is important to know why parents were so keen to have their children seen as being key workers and preachers. All Jehovah's Witnesses strive to be seen as "a good example" of their Faith. In fact, Elders, Ministerial Servants, Pioneers (full-time preachers) cannot hold their positions unless they have children who are themselves "good examples." An appointed man within the congregation can lose his position if his child or children are not themselves setting a good example. Tremendous pressure is put on family heads to have their children under control and "in subjection." The children are given the role of "unbaptized publishers", and "publishers", enroll in the 'Ministry School' where they act in small scenarios on the Kingdom Hall platform in front of the whole congregation to demonstrate their preaching and teaching skills. To be allowed these 'privileges', they must be a 'good example' so from an early age into their teenage years, this pressure is applied to keep the family looking good in the eyes of the congregation.

This is not to mention all the pre-Assembly work, as a child with my father, digging and laying toilet drains for large conventions at Twickenham, every year transporting and loading equipment from stores to the Assembly site, both national Assembly and local Circuit Assembly. Cleaning and gardening at several Kingdom Halls, fetching refreshments for the adults from shops, in fact lots more activities."

- John Viney

7. Recruitment of new members (also "witnessing")

Evidence of historic forced child labour

Recruitment of new members was also called "witnessing". Fear, obligation and guilt plus physical discipline would often be used to neurotically enforce the recruitment by children in the ministry, at school and pressure was applied to witness at every opportunity.

Whenever we were at school, or at events, or just talking to friends or neighbours, we were neurotically required to "witness" to our peers, our teachers, and basically any non-Jehovah's Witnesses members of the public. We wanted to have fun and enjoy birthday parties, after school sports and recreational time. But we were expected to bring new members into the congregation to start the process of becoming a member by starting a bible study with them. There was an ever-present threat of Armageddon coming

and we were coerced to rescue our friends and strangers from doomsday so that they could enjoy paradise on earth with us.

At the end of each month, we were expected to hand over our field service reports in the local congregation. When I was a child, we had to write how many pieces of literature we sold, how many hours we were out in 'field service' (witnessing), how many people we had committed to visit again, and how many bible studies we started. If we didn't do enough 'hours' we felt bad. Each month the hours quota was reset and we had to start from scratch.

I remember once that the compulsion to witness became so ingrained after a lifetime of indoctrination, that at my favourite Uncle's death bed, his siblings surrounded us and obsessively witnessed to the doctors and nurses even as his life support machine was switched off. As the colour slowly drained from his face, I held his warm hand in tears listening to them talk about Jehovah to the doctors and nurses. It was so de-humanising and I remembered in that moment being immensely embarrassed as a child at being forced to 'love bomb' strangers in all possible environments.

I am aware that evidence is available in survivor children's diaries, corporate and religious records, and samples can be supplied upon request. Refer also, to the stories of Angela Rogers and John Viney, within this submission.

FIELD SERVICE REPORT	
Name:
Month:
Placements (Printed and Electronic)	
Video Showings	
Hours	
Return Visits	
Number of <i>Different</i> Bible Studies Conducted	
Comments:	

S-4-E 10/15

Figure 7: S-4 2015 Field Service Report

CONGREGATION'S FIELD SERVICE AND MEETING ATTENDANCE REPORT

(Congregation name) (City) (Province or state)

Report for _____ (Month/Year) Congregation number: _____

	Number Reporting	Hours	Return Visits	Bible Studies
Publishers				
Auxiliary Pioneers				
Regular Pioneers				

Active Publishers: _____

Average Weekend Meeting Attendance: _____

(Secretary—Sign and print name)

S-1-E 8/19

Figure 8: S-1 2019 Congregation's Field Service and meeting attendance report

Barriers to recognising and reporting forced child labour within the Jehovah's Witnesses

"The lack of awareness around what modern slavery is is [sic] a major issue," Professor Burn said, mainly because when people think of slaves "they conjure up images of people in chains".²²

Most Jehovah's Witnesses are not aware that they are forced labourers. They often think that they are donating cash, resources and time of their own free will. They felt helpful. They thought that they were saving the world by recruiting others, all building, cleaning, cooking and selling books and magazines together. It is not until they leave that it slowly dawns on them that they have been used. Some are so embarrassed that they could fall prey to this and/or so highly controlled, that they will argue strenuously that it was their own fault.

"More women and girls are victims and survivors than men and boys and that's reflected around the world," she said.²³

Many Jehovah's Witnesses men benefitted from the forced child labour. They felt empowered. They felt powerful. Some took such advantage of the vulnerable, and could be so worried that they could be

²² <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/australias-modern-slaves-are-a-real-mix-and-they-are-suffering-in-silence/eymo369zv>>

²³ <<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/australias-modern-slaves-are-a-real-mix-and-they-are-suffering-in-silence/eymo369zv>>

liable if their part in the forced labour was exposed, that they would do or say anything to cover it up. But in truth, it was a pyramid scheme.

Some barriers to this recognition and subsequent lack of reporting are:

1. **restricted democratic rights**²⁴. Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to vote or take part in politics. This means that they're often very naïve to what is happening in government and parliament, so their awareness is low.
2. **low education rates**²⁵
3. **low-income rates**²⁶
4. **high endogamy rates**²⁷. The population of Jehovah's Witnesses is very low as a percentage of the general population; it's less than 0.5% of the Australian population. As endogamy (marrying within your own faith) is a very strong doctrine, many Jehovah's Witnesses are related to forced child labourers in their own congregation or nearby congregations. Due to these circumstances, cognitive dissonance may block both the forced child labourers and the perpetrators of forced child labour from recognising the situation and, even if they do, it may influence them to not report against their family members. Similarly, parents and former leaders may be unable to recognise and accept their own role in being participants or complicit enforcers within their own congregations or families.
5. **legal entity swapping**. "As soon we attempt to resolve the issue, the Jehovah's Witnesses will restructure their corporations, update their internal policy manuals, produce a corporate video and publish an article saying, "We don't do that". All of this will be to deny or cover up what they're being questioned about to prove their case."²⁸
6. **emotions, thought, information and behavioural control**. Jehovah's Witness leaders haven't shared any information about their own coerced modern slavery on their official website: jw.org. They have not included anything in their Elder's manual, known as *Shepherd the Flock of God*. They have not shared any information on coerced modern slavery via their regular body of elder's letter, nor in their weekly congregational meetings, or posted anything in their Kingdom Halls. They're controlling the information to such a degree that people will never see it through their official channel, which is the one they often choose to believe. However, I believe that they are aware of what they have done. Because after some whistleblowers started exposing concerns of modern slavery, a major doctrinal change resulted in the ceasing of collecting records on "witnessing" in the 'field service'²⁹.

²⁴ <<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/political-neutrality/>>

²⁵ <<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/chapter-3-demographic-profiles-of-religious-groups/#educational-attainment-and-income-of-religious-groups>>

²⁶ <<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/chapter-3-demographic-profiles-of-religious-groups/#educational-attainment-and-income-of-religious-groups>>

²⁷ <<https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20150315/marry-only-in-lord-realistic/>>

²⁸ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=committees/commjnt/27453/&sid=0001 (Steven Unthank quote to Lara Kaput, prior to giving witness testimony appearing before the Australian Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme on 20 October 2023)

²⁹ <<https://fortune.com/2023/11/22/jehovahs-witnesses-preaching-metrics-policy-change/>>

Failure of the United Nations (ILO and the UN Youth Envoy) to instigate a global investigation

In 2019, I contacted the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UN Youth Envoy to report my allegations and to warn them of a silent crisis. I continued to follow up with the ILO for four years with no result.

Between July and September 2023, my colleague Steven Unthank, and I met in person with other forced child labourers and whistleblowers in more than ten countries across Europe, Scandinavia, and the UK. I asked at least one representative from each of 10 countries if they would be willing to make a statement on their lived experience of forced child labour to submit to the ILO. They unanimously said yes; each of them committed to write their stories.

In August 2023, we visited the ILO office in Geneva, Switzerland and shared that we had many Jehovah's Witness survivors willing to submit statements. I asked how we could make our complaints effective. A member of the *Child Labour | Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch* team advised that an Australian NGO should represent us with a consolidated submission to the ILO.

According to the International Labor Organization, "child labour"³⁰ is defined as

"work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or*
- interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work."*

The worst forms of child labour, a subset of child labour, are:

- a) slavery, debt bondage, trafficking and similar practices*
- b) the use, procurement or offering of a child for commercial sexual exploitation, including the use of children in pornography*
- c) illicit activities such as drug trafficking, and*
- d) work which, by its nature (e.g., spraying pesticides) or the circumstances in which it is carried out (e.g., for long hours), puts their health, safety or morals at risk--known as "hazardous work".*

Forced labour³¹, is defined as

"work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily".

(a), b) and c), above, constitute forms of forced labour of children."

³⁰ <<https://www.ilo.org/ipec/lang--en/index.htm>>

³¹ <<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>>

Failure of Non-Governmental Organisations (Amnesty International, Save the Children, World Vision and UNICEF) to provide support for children

In October 2023, I reached out to four child-focused NGOs (Amnesty International, Save the Children, World Vision, and UNICEF) to bring a complaint of forced child labour against the Jehovah's Witnesses to the ILO. Each of them declined to support me, as ours is not the type of advocacy they're involved in. They explained that their role is to collect donations from developed countries to support third world countries, as third world countries do not have the infrastructure to support themselves. I was left plainly devastated.

Addressing Coercive Control

We need to consider that there may be barriers to effectively deal with a religion being a perpetrator of modern slavery under the guise of religious belief. On 22nd September 2022, the Attorney-General of Australia, the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP, published the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence³². The National Principles in Depth addresses cultural, spiritual and religious abuse:

*"A perpetrator may use a person's culture, spirituality or religion to control them, or may exert their own culture, spirituality or religion upon them. This could include controlling how they practice their culture, spirituality or faith, or criticising, shaming or belittling their beliefs. A perpetrator may deny a victim-survivor access to contraception or medical intervention on the basis of their culture, spirituality or religion. A perpetrator may not allow a victim-survivor to speak in their language of choice or observe cultural practices or religious holidays, or may force them to convert to their religion."*³³

The issue of institutional coercive control presents a golden opportunity for the UK to facilitate a solution.

Legal Advice

We recently met with an Australian legal firm specialising in modern slavery, in which we were advised of further avenues to explore, including but not limited to:

³² <<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/publications/national-principles-address-coercive-control-family-and-domestic-violence>>

³³ <<https://www.ag.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/national-principles-to-address-coercive-control-family-and-domestic-violence.PDF>>

- the Australian Federal Police (AFP's) Human trafficking and exploitation team, who investigate the crime types set out in Division 270 and 271 of the criminal code³⁴, and that the AFP may represent survivors nationally³⁵;
- that we could make civil claims for breach of duty of care, with an example of such a claim³⁶;
- that we could make a direct treaty complaint to the United Nations Committee Convention under the Convention on the Rights of the Child³⁷;
- approaching the Red Cross, as they have anti-slavery experience and are multi-national; and
- referral to the recent review into the modern slavery offences, led by the Australian Attorney-General's department³⁸.

We have commenced exploring these with a path to protect children and achieve justice.

³⁴ <<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2023C00283>>

³⁵ <https://forms.afp.gov.au/online_forms/human_trafficking_form>

³⁶ <<https://www.unswlawjournal.unsw.edu.au/article/tortious-remedies-for-deliberate-wrongdoing-to-victims-of-human-trafficking-and-slavery-in-australia>>

³⁷ <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc/individual-communications>>

³⁸ <<https://consultations.ag.gov.au/crime/modern-slavery-offences/>>

Noncompliance and Human Rights violations as indicators for modern slavery

In her witness testimony to the NSW Modern Slavery parliamentary review on 30 October 2023, the Hon Dr Sarah Kaine stated, “...noncompliance in one area is a very strong indicator of noncompliance in another area, particularly with labour standards.”³⁹ In the same vein, Dr Martijn Boersma submitted that “...governments are at substantial risk of being linked to labour exploitation and human rights violations.”⁴⁰

Government inquiries on Jehovah’s Witness noncompliance and human rights violations

Since 2012, at least the following inquiries occurred globally:

- 2019: the Pennsylvanian Attorney General approved a Grand Jury investigation into child sexual abuse within the Jehovah’s Witnesses⁴¹. This has been ongoing for over 5 years⁴².
- 2019: The Netherlands launched an investigation into child sexual abuse within the Jehovah’s Witnesses. A 2019 report carried out by the University of Utrecht, as reported by Reuters, found that “about 80% of the 751 members who came forward to speak with researchers had reported abuse to leaders within the community”.⁴³
- 2018: New Zealand’s *Abuse in Care Royal Commission* formed an inquiry that included child sexual abuse. In April 2022, the Terms of Reference were extended to include religious institutions, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁴⁴
- 2018: A jury in Montana awarded \$35 million to child sex abuse victim Alexis Nunez, in a judgment against the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Supreme court then overturned the verdict as Jehovah’s Witnesses were exempt from reporting.⁴⁵
- 2017: An almost \$50 million (CAN \$66 million) *class action* lawsuit was filed by Canadian victims of child sexual abuse, against the Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁴⁶
- 2016: Germany announced an *Independent Commission for Processing Child Sexual Abuse* involving Jehovah’s Witnesses among others.⁴⁷
- 2014: England and Wales announced an *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)* involving groups including the Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁴⁸

³⁹ <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/transcripts/3139/Transcript%20-%20Review%20Modern%20Slavery%20Act%20-%2030%20October%202023%20-%20UNCORRECTED.pdf>>

⁴⁰ <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/82203/0007%20Dr%20Martijn%20Boersma.pdf>>

⁴¹ <<https://www.fox43.com/article/news/local/pa-grand-jury-investigation-systemic-cover-up-child-sex-abuse-jehovahs-witnesses/521-3ebc3df5-6044-4982-ac96-fc473c8a865f>>

⁴² <<https://fortune.com/2023/11/22/jehovahs-witnesses-preaching-metrics-policy-change/>>

⁴³ <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-women-crime-trfn-idUSKBN25O2IV/>>

⁴⁴ <<https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/our-progress/news/treaty-of-waitangi-underpins-us/>>

⁴⁵ <<https://law.justia.com/cases/montana/supreme-court/2020/da-19-0077-0.html>>

⁴⁶ <<https://revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-sued-in-canda-for-history-of-sex-abuse-cover-up/>>

⁴⁷ <<https://www.aufarbeitungskommission.de/service-presse/service/meldungen/sexueller-kindesmissbrauch-bei-den-zeugen-jehovas-die-neunten-werkstattgespraeche-teil-1/>>

⁴⁸ <<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20221216171718/https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/26895/view/child-protection-religious-organisations-settings-investigation-report-september-2021-.pdf>>

- 2013: A San Francisco judge awarded Jose Lopez \$13.5 million against the Jehovah's Witnesses, which was appealed and settled for an undisclosed amount in 2018. Also, the Jehovah's Witnesses were sanctioned (paying USD\$ 4,000 per day) due to withholding documents.⁴⁹
- 2012: The Australian Prime Minister announced a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse implicating the Jehovah's Witnesses in alleged child sexual abuse cases. Findings of the final report included that "the allegations, reports or complaints that the organisation received relate to at least 1,800 alleged victims of child sexual abuse" and "there was no relevant legislated mandated reporting obligation in most of the jurisdictions in which the 1,006 alleged perpetrators were reported".⁵⁰

New allegations of Jehovah's Witnesses noncompliance and human rights violations (coercive financial fraud)



Figure 9: Menlo Park Kingdom Hall was at the centre of an investigation of money laundering

The Menlo Park Kingdom Hall (church) in figure 9 was built by congregants, some of whom were each other's childhood friends. The Kingdom Hall property deed was transferred from ownership by the congregants who built it to another entity owned by the Jehovah's Witness leaders^{51, 52}. This meant that the work they did as children in maintaining the facility was for profit.

From 1983, Jehovah's Witnesses were acting as unregistered as an institutional financial lender. To expedite the building of Kingdom Halls, Canadian and US Jehovah's Witnesses were encouraged to borrow money from them (via the Society Kingdom Hall Fund, which was funded by donations). From at least 1985, they provided loans (or mortgages) to congregations, with 6% interest. Since at least 1987, to

⁴⁹ <<https://revealnews.org/article/how-jehovahs-witnesses-leaders-hide-child-abuse-secrets-at-all-costs/>>

⁵⁰ <<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/Case%20Study%2029%20-%20Findings%20Report%20-%20Jehovahs%20Witnesses.pdf>>

⁵¹ <<https://jwleaks.org/scandals/menlo-park-congregation/>>

⁵² <https://www.reddit.com/r/exjw/comments/2z6vvp/menlo_park_kingdom_hall_takeover_scandal_1_how/?rdt=39303>

build and renovate Kingdom Halls, the Watchtower encouraged United Kingdom Jehovah's Witnesses to borrow money from them, which they called 'low-cost financing'. In 1999, they reduced the interest rate to 3%. In approximately 2014, they gave the appearance of stopping this practice ("...will no longer be asked to repay a loan"), yet in the same communication, the Elders were asked to continue sending "...at least the same amount...", or more. Note the involvement of multiple legal entities.

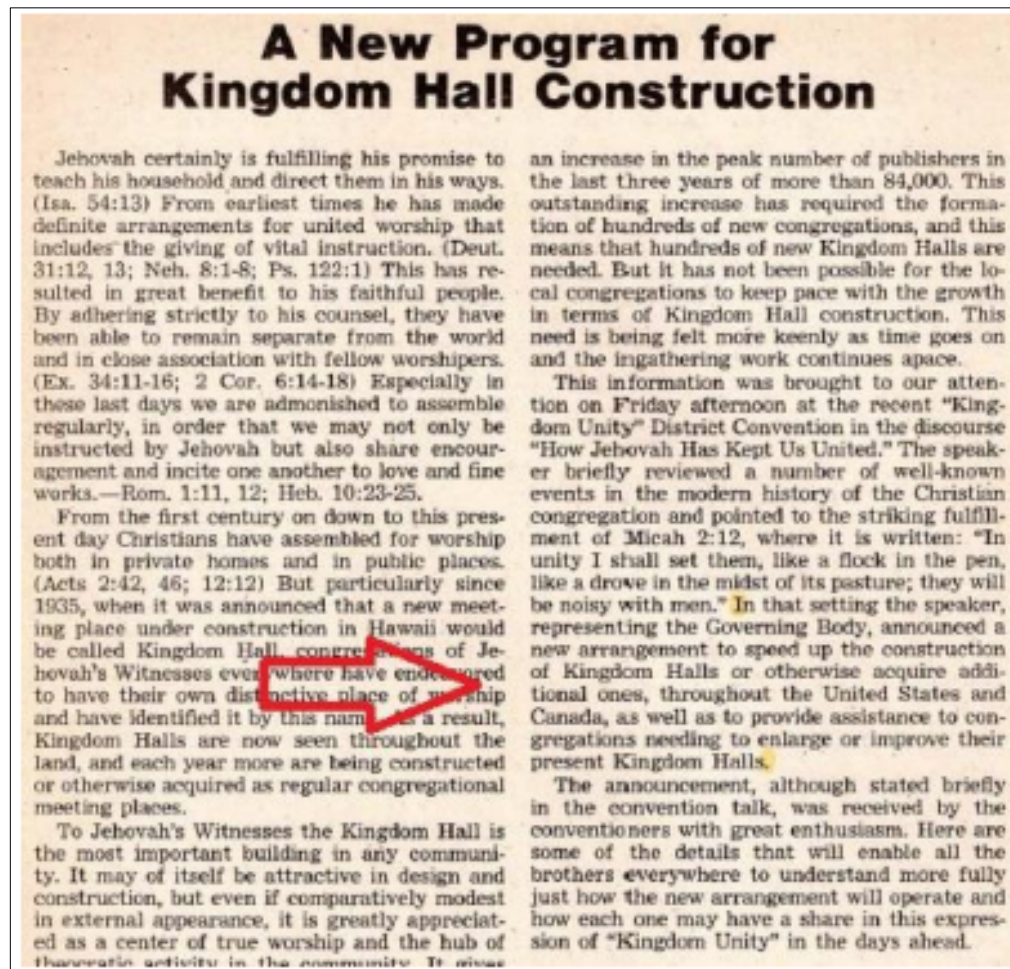
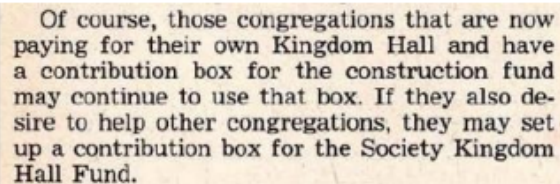


Figure 10: Kingdom Ministry September 1983, page 4

A special contribution box was also set up in Kingdom Halls worldwide so that Jehovah's Witnesses

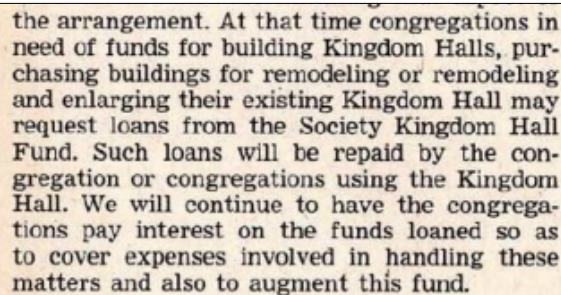
could make their own donations to the fund.



Of course, those congregations that are now paying for their own Kingdom Hall and have a contribution box for the construction fund may continue to use that box. If they also desire to help other congregations, they may set up a contribution box for the Society Kingdom Hall Fund.

Figure 11: Kingdom Ministry September 1983, page 5

Congregations were told that they will be paying interest on these loans.



the arrangement. At that time congregations in need of funds for building Kingdom Halls, purchasing buildings for remodeling or remodeling and enlarging their existing Kingdom Hall may request loans from the Society Kingdom Hall Fund. Such loans will be repaid by the congregation or congregations using the Kingdom Hall. We will continue to have the congregations pay interest on the funds loaned so as to cover expenses involved in handling these matters and also to augment this fund.

Figure 12: Kingdom Ministry September 1983, page 5

Since at least 2013, Jehovah's Witnesses in the UK were led to believe that their donations were being used to help disaster relief victims or building Kingdom Halls. In a 2013 letter, designed for Philippine's disaster relief, the Watchtower wrote at the bottom of the letter: "However, it would be appreciated if such donations are made without restrictions as to where and how the funds may be used." This allowed money to be potentially transferred cross-jurisdictionally for a different purpose.



Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

The Ridgeway, London, NW7 1RN Telephone: 020 8906 2211

November 20, 2013

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS

Re: Philippines disaster relief

Dear Brothers:

Many publishers have inquired how to contribute to the disaster relief effort underway following the recent disasters in the Philippines. Never underestimate the good effect that your prayers can have on the brothers in an area that has been struck by a disaster. (2 Cor. 1:8-11) You may also feel motivated to express your concern through a donation. The November 2005 issue of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 3, stated: "It is recommended that donations for humanitarian and relief assistance be made to the worldwide work. This fund is used for relief efforts as well as for advancing the spiritual needs of the Christian brotherhood. If, for some reason, a person wishes to make a relief donation separate from contributions to the worldwide work, it will still be accepted and used wherever there is a need for relief assistance. However, it would be appreciated if such donations are made without restrictions as to where and how the funds may be used." Additionally, at this time, there is no need for donations of food, clothing, or other items. If such needs arise in the future, you will be notified accordingly.

We send our warm Christian love.

Your brothers,
*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to the coordinator of the body of elders:

Please arrange for this letter to be read to the congregation at the first meeting after its receipt. Thereafter, it should be posted on the information board.

11/20/13-E

Figure 13 Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses UK letter November 20, 2013

In 2014, congregations were required to send any money in excess of \$5,000 to head office to be pooled, even if that money was intended to pay for repairs at their existing congregation Kingdom Hall (church), or even a new Kingdom Hall⁵³. (Documented evidence available on request.)

Then in January 2021, instead of honouring contributions made to a 'Special Building Fund, for the purpose of a film studio in Australia⁵⁴', money was offshored from Australia to the 'World Wide Work', allowing it to be transferred to the US for a different purpose. We believe this type of activity also occurs in the UK.

Suggestions

Suggestions for legislative effectiveness, efficacious provisions, and for the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

Suggestion 1: Government support, which address cultural, spiritual and religious abuse to provide advice to train psychologists in religious behaviours to create structured pathways to support persons who may be under coercive control that keeps them in modern slavery.

Suggestion 2: Government support, which address cultural, spiritual and religious abuse to provide advice to create multimedia education (via newspapers, radio, social media and television) for government, the general public and current and former Jehovah's Witnesses to recognise religious coercive control as a barrier to escaping modern slavery.

Suggestion 3: Government support, which address cultural, spiritual and religious abuse to provide advice to create awareness within relevant government departments that religion and religious beliefs may be holding a person in a modern slavery.

Suggestion 4: Government support, which address cultural, spiritual and religious abuse, to provide advice to investigate corporate coercion / financial fraud and abuse by religious charities and entities.

Suggestion 5: Increased regulation of religious charities to prevent the use of religious coercive control, and ongoing educational awareness relating to modern slavery.

Suggestion 6: For the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to engage and consult with qualified Jehovah's Witnesses stakeholders, for example, by inclusion into survivor panels or roundtables on human trafficking or modern slavery.

Suggestion 7: For the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to commission a research study to confirm the numbers of child and adult forced labourers.

Suggestion 8: For the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to have adequate investigative and enforcement powers relevant to faith-based communities.

⁵³ <<https://jwvictims.org/conventions-kingdom-halls-relief-funds-and-other-financial-scams-and-schemes-of-jehovahs-witnesses/>>

⁵⁴ <<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/liverpool-leader/jehovahs-witnesses-australasia-proposes-film-studio-office-and-replica-biblical-site/news-story/7997a66dbe24ef1a24beea6805d97d68>>

Attachment 1 – Theocratic Warfare

The excerpt below was republished within an article by Reveal News, and shows an original *The Watchtower* magazine, with some descriptions of how theocratic warfare works in practice⁵⁵. It should be noted that this Theocratic War Strategy has never been revoked:

“Rather, she was using theocratic war strategy, hiding the truth by action and word for the sake of the ministry.”

And

“At times he may prefer to refuse to speak and suffer the consequences rather than betray his brothers or the interests of God’s work.”

And

“But hiding the truth, which he is not entitled to know, from an enemy does not harm him...”

NEW YORK, N. Y. MAY 1, 1957 The WATCHTOWER 285

name she bears, “Jehovah our righteousness”! (Jer. 33:16, AS) And what a joy is ours in reflecting on high the divine light beaming down upon us from her royal person as we welcome all lowly-hearted ones from the dark corners of the world to come out into the brightness of Jehovah’s pleasure and bask in the warmth of his smiling approval!

¹⁶ With thankful hearts we acknowledge God’s mercy and gratefully and willingly show our respect for Jehovah’s organization, for she is our mother and the beloved wife of our heavenly Father, Jehovah God.

Use Theocratic War Strategy

A WITNESS of Jehovah was going from house to house in Eastern Germany when she met a violent opposer. Knowing at once what to expect she changed her red blouse for a green one in the very next hallway. No sooner had she appeared on the street than a Communist officer asked her if she had seen a woman with a red blouse. No, she replied, and went on her way. Did she tell a lie? No, she did not. She was not a liar. Rather, she was using theocratic war strategy, hiding the truth by action and word for the sake of the ministry.

In this she had good Scriptural precedent. Did not Rahab hide the Israelite spies by both action and word? Did not Abraham, Isaac, David and others likewise hide the truth at times when faced with a hostile enemy? They certainly did, and never do we read a word of censure for their doing so. Rather, we read of their being termed exemplary servants of Jehovah. Their actions were in line with Jesus’ wise counsel: “Look! I am sending you forth as sheep amidst wolves; therefore prove yourselves cautious as serpents and yet innocent as doves.”—Matt. 10:16, NW.*

Perhaps some will wonder as to where the line is to be drawn between use of theocratic war strategy in hiding the truth and the telling of lies. First of all, let it be noted that whenever one takes an oath to tell the truth he is obligated to do so. By dedicating himself to do God’s will each Christian has taken a vow or made an oath to do God’s will and to be faithful to him. To this oath he certainly must be true. Likewise, when a Christian is placed on a witness stand he is obligated to speak the truth if he speaks at all. At times he may prefer to refuse to speak and suffer the consequences rather than betray his brothers or the interests of God’s work. And, of course, there is no occasion for use of war strategy when dealing with our Christian brothers. In dealing with them we tell the truth or tactfully remind them that what they seek to know does not concern them.

Lies are untruths told for selfish reasons and which work injury to others. Satan told a lie to Eve that worked great harm to her and all the human race. Ananias and Sapphira told lies for selfish reasons. But hiding the truth, which he is not entitled to know, from an enemy does not harm him, especially when he would use such information to harm others who are innocent.


A great work is being done by the witnesses even in lands where their activity is banned. The only way they can fulfill the command to preach the good news of God’s kingdom is by use of theocratic war strategy. By underground methods the literature is brought into the country and distributed. Would it make sense to hide

* For details see *The Watchtower*, February 1, 1956.

⁵⁵ <<https://revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-can-hide-the-truth-in-court-to-protect-religion/>>

Attachment 2 – Response from Walk Free regarding faith communities and modern slavery data inclusion

RE: NSW Modern Slavery submission with estimates of 28,125 Australian children in forced child labour



Info Walk Free [redacted]
To: [redacted]

15 Mar at 1:04 pm

Dear Lara,

Please accept our sincere apologies for our delayed response.

We appreciate your continued advocacy and taking the time to share your submission to the NSW Modern Slavery inquiry with us.

Having reviewed your submission, we acknowledge that some of the examples you allege could meet the definition of the worst forms of child labour. As you rightly point out, forced labour requires involuntary work to be done under the menace of penalty – and coercion by family members and where relevant, community leaders, are a common feature in practice. There are also further legal guidelines around child labour and hazardous child labour, the worst forms of which we include in our modern slavery estimates.

We would welcome hearing more about the outcomes of your conversations with the International Labor Organisation and the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner on this issue.

Inclusion of data in estimates

By way of a brief overview of our survey methods, through Walk Free's partnership with the International Labour Office and the International Organisation for Migration, we run nationally representative surveys in over 70 countries via the Gallup World Poll to produce global and regional level estimates of forced labour and forced marriage. We then use risk modelling to attribute these figures to 160 countries in the Global Slavery Index, which provides a breakdown of the number of people living in modern slavery by country. This is an oversimplification of our methodology, but I would be happy to share our methods paper which is due to be released in the coming weeks, if that would be of interest?

With reference to your request to include the estimated number of children in the Australian Jehovah's Witness community in our modern slavery estimates, we note that cases that form the basis of our estimates come from two sources: (1) those reported by respondents surveyed in our worldwide nationally representative survey program or (2) those who are included in data captured by the IOM Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative.

With our methodology in mind, including new case sources is not feasible at this time as it can introduce statistical bias to our data and create new challenges when trying to add estimates to estimates. This can have an impact on the scientific validity of the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery.

However, we are aware that our estimates likely underrepresent the size of the issue, even though representative surveys are the current gold standard approach to produce national estimates of modern slavery. We take care to note that our estimates are best used as a conservative baseline for the number of people living in situations of modern slavery. Importantly, we continue to work with the ILO to identify better sources of data and development stronger estimates and will consider how to better capture the situations you have described in a way that can be applied globally.

Work with faith communities

In reviewing the submission you shared, we note that you raised some concerns relating to the Minderoo Foundation as having a religious blind spot. The role of faith leaders and communities is very important in the work we do, and we have provided a short explanation of our approach below.

We are aware that some actors can use religious ideas to justify certain harmful practices, such as child or early marriage, female genital mutilation, or honour-based crimes. Often, these practices can stem from outdated or misguided understandings of theological teachings. Walk Free directly engages with faith leaders through our faith-based arm, the Global Freedom Network, to empower faith leaders with the information and tools to identify and discuss modern slavery with their communities. Walk Free also supports attitudinal change programs through civil society partners in high prevalence countries, some of which engage with local faith leaders to combat harmful social norms.

We work with faith leaders as we know that a large percentage of people worldwide hold some kind of faith, and we appreciate that faith leaders are uniquely positioned in communities and have a direct role in influencing beliefs and actions. Through the Global Freedom Network, we have provided leaders across the major denominations with modern slavery trainings, as well as having worked with interfaith groups to develop guidelines for faith leaders to address child marriage in their communities and have developed a global network of faith leaders who stand against modern slavery. For transparency, I note that the Global Freedom Network has not had any specific outreach with Jehovah's Witness leaders to provide them with modern slavery training or tools.

We are heartened to hear that you have referred the cases alleged in your submission to the Australian Federal Police for further investigation.

Lara, thank you once again for your time and sharing your expertise. Thanks also for bearing with us, and we sincerely apologise once again for our delayed response.

Yours sincerely,

The Walk Free team

Submission to the Select Committee on the Modern Slavery Act 2015 – Jehovah's Witnesses

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